

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 8

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N° 8

3rd Session
41st Parliament

Thursday
29 March 2018

3^e session
41^e législature

Jeudi
29 mars 2018

Speaker: Honourable Dave Levac
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Dave Levac
Greffier : Todd Decker

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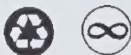
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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-2987

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 29 March 2018

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 29 mars 2018

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES TRANSFORMATION ACT, 2018

LOI DE 2018 SUR LA TRANSFORMATION DES SERVICES CORRECTIONNELS

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 27, 2018, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 6, An Act to enact the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services Act, 2018 and the Correctional Services and Reintegration Act, 2018, to make related amendments to other Acts, to repeal an Act and to revoke a regulation / *Projet de loi 6, Loi édictant la Loi de 2018 sur le ministère de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels et la Loi de 2018 sur les services correctionnels et la réinsertion sociale, apportant des modifications connexes à d'autres lois et abrogeant une loi et un règlement.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I am pleased to rise in the House today to address what I believe to be a very serious problem. The Liberal government has a history of producing incomplete, skeletal and poorly-thought-out legislation. This bill is no exception to that rule. The Correctional Services Transformation Act, 2018, is supposed to be a thorough overhaul of a broken correctional system, but it has the same deficiencies as most other Liberal legislation. I will get into why I believe that. The bill will not resolve what has come to be called #CrisisInCorrections. Now they have a new hashtag out there: #FixIt.

Before I get into the meat of the bill, Mr. Speaker, let me just tell you a little bit about that crisis. Last year, a report by the independent adviser on corrections reform, the IACR, described shocking abuses and disorder in Ontario's detention centres. Detention centres are overcrowded and cellblock violence is a huge problem; in fact, it's at an all-time high.

After violent incidents, inmates are often held in solitary confinement without access to rehab programs, and lockdowns are often the only recourse due to short staffing. This has the potential to invite serious abuses. But even when solitary confinement, or segregation, isn't used as punishment, it still poses a huge problem.

Under the Liberals' watch, prisoners like Adam Capay have been held in solitary confinement awaiting trial. Capay was held for four years in conditions so degrading that previous inmates of the same cell had died, but the Liberals just didn't seem to care. They ignored repeated coroners' inquests warning of unsafe conditions. Fifty reports went to the minister's office and they were all ignored—50 reports. It would be convenient to say that the corrections minister was simply asleep at the switch, but in fact, the minister at the time had made a personal visit to Adam Capay's cell. Sadly, not even that prompted him to act, and the Liberal government continued to ignore the problem.

It only became a problem for the Premier and her government when Adam Capay's case finally reached the newspapers—so much for the myth of the social justice government and the social justice Premier; that's how the Premier said she wanted to be remembered. I don't think it's working.

Also released last year, a surveillance video from the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre in London shows how bad violence in detention centres can be. In that video, an inmate can be seen beating his cellmate to death. A staffing shortage prevented the kind of intervention that might have stopped that altercation. This is part of a systemic problem.

Sadly, assaults on correctional officers and other staff have more than doubled over the past seven years. That's a very alarming increase. My contacts within the world of corrections mention it whenever we speak, and that's often.

Much of the violence in Ontario's detention centres is derived from smuggled weapons and drugs. Full-body scanners would do a lot to keep those things out of detention centres, but not all Ontario jails have scanners. A year ago, the Attorney General promised to install full-body scanners in all Ontario prisons, but we're still waiting. What's the holdup? Why does it take so long? Why does the government treat the corrections file like an afterthought?

But Speaker, it gets worse. Ontario's probation and parole system is a joke. Yes, that's exactly what criminals have called it. Our probation and parole officers are not to blame. In many cases, they are actively discouraged from checking up on criminals by making house visits because of insufficient resources. Many are told that they're not even allowed to work outside of business hours. Guidelines published by the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services explicitly state that the community visits are a valuable method of

verifying information and enhancing supervision, yet they're not happening. Offenders are often left to self-report but, obviously, very few do.

A 2014 report from the Ontario Auditor General drew attention to this problem and a shocking Global News documentary on corrections published last year came to the same conclusions. In that documentary, the corrections minister was unable to answer any questions seriously, and she was unable to explain why violent criminals were not being properly monitored. I found this to be outrageous, but it's clearly part of a pattern from this low-information government.

Here's what the stakeholders are saying about it. Under the Liberal regime over the past 15 years, probation and parole policymakers have put enormous emphasis on probation and parole offender risk assessments, such as domestic violence, sex offences, enhanced offender-needs risk assessments and so forth.

Strangely, this has basically transformed the role of probation and parole officer from that of a public safety peace officer to that of a psychotherapist or mental health clinician. Nothing brought this to light better than Carolyn Jarvis's Global News National investigative report entitled *Probation and Parole: Who's Watching?* As I said, the current minister was interviewed in that documentary. For the minister, unfortunately, it didn't go well. I wonder whether anyone in that government saw it.

0910

Anyway, Liberal probation and parole policies prohibit officers from conducting compliance checks and monitoring their offenders' adherence to probation and conditional sentence orders in the community.

My friend Scott McIntyre is vice-president of OPSEU and the probation and parole MERC representative. As he puts it, "The Liberals have removed the 'community' from community corrections." Scott has a way with words, so I'm going to quote him again. Here's what he had to say: "Excessive workloads and a lack of appropriate safety and security measures for probation and parole officers has handcuffed us to our desks." Handcuffed to our desks: That is a very shocking image, but I'm afraid it's what I would expect from a tired, out-of-touch, low-information government that does not respect its stakeholders.

The ministry says that the police are responsible for performing P&P compliance checks. However, Global's Investigative Report clearly confirmed that the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police do not agree that it is their responsibility to do that. Honestly, who is monitoring and who is performing compliance checks on the nearly 45,000 criminals who reside in our communities? Who is watching?

When we realize that 60% of those criminals are medium- to very high-risk, the crisis in corrections seems even more severe. This is an outrage. As the investigative report showed, offenders describe probation and parole supervision as a joke. And it's getting worse.

Since Howard Sapers released his report in the fall of 2017, we've seen an astonishing increase of more than

40% of criminals being released on parole. If this statistic were more widely known, people would be furious. It would appear that the Ontario Liberals have foolishly released criminals from custody into a probation and parole system that has a critical workload crisis and which does not perform offender monitoring in the form of compliance checks. I said earlier that over 45,000 people are on probation or parole, and 60% of that number are medium- to high-risk offenders. The Liberals have utterly failed at ensuring the safety of Ontarians by way of having sufficient staffing numbers of PPOs and a system that actively monitors offenders in our communities.

One of the most basic duties of a government is to maintain an orderly and safe society, but if criminals on parole or probation are not being properly supervised, then the government has failed to perform a key part of that duty. Front-line stakeholders such as corrections officers represented by the Ontario Public Service Employees Union are justifiably outraged.

I want to just take a moment. I received an email just yesterday. I mentioned Scott McIntyre. Scott is the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services probation and parole MERC rep. He was extremely disappointed in the budget for community safety and correctional services. Basically, there was nothing in there. They were saying that what they really need are 300 more probation and parole officers to effectively do the job and to monitor those probation and parole offenders, medium- to high-risk, who are out in our communities. Do you want them to self-report? Well, that's like asking a child to go into a candy store and saying, "Don't you dare touch the candy. I'll be back in a minute." A child is going to offend. They're going to disregard what you have to say.

So, again—extremely discouraged by the lack of respect that this government has for the community safety and correctional services aspect of probation and parole, as well as the corrections officers. I get worked up over that, Mr. Speaker.

Not long ago, that union began a letter-writing campaign to bring awareness to the crisis in corrections. Let me tell you what was said. I'm quoting now from an OPSEU media release: "For decades, the Ontario government has neglected our correctional facilities. As a result, there is a constant threat to the safety of inmates and staff.

"Further, our probation officers have such high workloads that they are unable to safely and effectively monitor offenders released into our communities." Let me say that again: They are "unable to safely and effectively monitor offenders released into our communities.

"These are just two issues that have created a crisis in corrections. The crisis poses a clear danger to staff safety, inmate safety, and public safety—and it must be addressed without further delay."

Emails went to MPPs, with copies to the Premier, the correctional services minister, the Attorney General and the crisis-in-corrections team. It was a great example of civic engagement, but the response was appalling.

Let me quote Chris Jackel, who is chairman of the bargaining committee team for the correctional bargaining unit. I am referencing another OPSEU media release here. "It's very discouraging when government MPPs try to deny that our correctional system is in crisis. It shows just how completely out of touch the government is with the reality in corrections." It's exactly what he said.

Furthermore, OPSEU condemned the canned, low-information response from this Liberal government. Mr. Jackel called the prepared message "highly politicized." He said it was "the kind of non-response politicians use at question period to avoid answering difficult questions. When you use them to respond to the genuine concerns of workers on the ground, they're just a slap in the face."

"Just a slap in the face," Mr. Speaker. Those are strong words indeed, but I'm afraid I have to agree.

By way of example, Jackel came down hard on the government's assertion that "Ontario's streets are safer than ever." Jackel described the claim as "preposterous." He pointed out that a Global News investigation revealed that there are no compliance checks for as many as 50,000 offenders in the community, including sex offenders—no compliance checks, which includes sex offenders? Furthermore, Ontario has the country's highest rates of recidivism.

That brings us back to the origin of this bill that we're now debating. The Liberal government, which is about to shuffle off this mortal coil, wants us to believe that they've had a deathbed conversion—or maybe a pre-election conversion would be more accurate.

I suppose that the Liberals just didn't want to go down in history as dumb on crime. They wanted one last shot at addressing the stakeholders' anger and maybe at correcting their own mistakes. So, less than 72 days before the next election, they finally introduce a bill which purports to resolve the crisis that I just described. Well, I really do want to emphasize that word "purports," because this bill is really the triumph of hope over experience.

I note that OPSEU was pleased about one major aspect of the bill, however, which is that the government seems to finally have decided that there really is a crisis in corrections. Otherwise, the bill leaves much to be desired.

When it comes to criticizing the bill, the problem is not where to begin but where to stop. So let's start.

Let me draw your attention to one of the strangest aspects of this bill. Would you believe me if I told you that the government is giving itself 10 years to bring this bill into effect? Ten years; unbelievable. You can see it for yourself in subsection 147(2) of the bill.

0920

What kind of government needs 10 years to pass and implement a law? Did the Chrétien-Martin government pass legislation only to have it finally implemented under Stephen Harper a decade later? Did the McGuinty government spend its early years passing and implementing legislation for the Mike Harris and Ernie Eves government? Is Prime Minister Gerald Butts—I mean, Justin

Trudeau—busy passing Stephen Harper's bills? No, that would be laughable.

So there are two things a reasonable person might conclude about this strange timeline. One is that the Liberals think that they deserve to be in power forever. They think they will be in power forever, or at least 10 years from now, so the ridiculous 10-year timetable will suit that fantasy just fine.

Another, more likely, possibility is that the Liberals don't know how to solve the crisis in corrections and don't expect to be able to do so ever. Mr. Speaker, my instincts tell me that the second one is true, not the first. And this absurdly long timeline is a good enough reason on its own to reject the bill altogether.

There are, of course, other good reasons. Let us remind ourselves again of the context of the crisis in corrections. The bill comes in response to a series of damning reports and investigations by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, the Ontario Ombudsman, the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre Task Force and the independent adviser on corrections. Sadly, some of their findings highlight problems that were already old but haven't been addressed yet.

My friend Monte Vieselmeyer, who is chairman of the ministry employee relations committee for correctional services at OPSEU, had this to say in a press release last year: "The ministry has failed to give front-line staff the tools they need to properly manage segregation. I refer to these tools as the three Ts: training, technology, and time." He goes on to say, "Of course, none of these things comes without a price tag. They require substantial funding and staffing investments by the ministry. If they're serious about easing the crisis around segregation, they have to address the larger crisis in corrections."

OPSEU President Warren "Smokey" Thomas had strong comments also. In response to the Ombudsman's report on segregation, he had the following to say: "None of this is new—it's all about a properly funded corrections system and properly funded public services. There's just no getting around it, and nothing is going to change until this government finally takes responsibility for easing the crises that its austerity agenda has created."

Speaker, we're talking about a serious breakdown in an important part of our justice system and a failure to enforce law and order. We're talking about problems which extend to every part of the corrections system. Minor tinkering is not going to help; I call that putting a band-aid on an open wound.

Let me repeat so that I'm not misunderstood: Detention centres are crowded. Cellblock violence is a huge problem. After violent incidents, inmates are often held in solitary confinement without access to rehabilitation programs.

Newly released surveillance video from the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre in London shows just how bad the violence can be. In that video—and I have mentioned this before—an inmate can be seen beating his cellmate to death. A staffing shortage prevented the kind of intervention that might have stopped the altercation.

Assaults on correctional officers and other staff have more than doubled over the past seven years. Too many inmates are now held in solitary confinement, often in appalling conditions, and sometimes for years. The Ontario Human Rights Commission has taken the government to court over such terrible abuses.

Why am I reminding you of all this, Mr. Speaker? Well, let me tell you. People often say that Canada's founding motto is "peace, order and good government." That's from the British North America Act. Apart from that, the maintenance of order is an important conservative principle.

Edmund Burke, the father of English-speaking conservatism, put it best: "The only liberty that is valuable is a liberty connected with order; that not only exists along with order and virtue, but which cannot exist at all without them. It inheres in good and steady government, as in its substance and vital principle."

But what is order? Let me answer that question by quoting American historian and political theorist Russell Kirk: "'Order' is the principle and the process by which the peace and harmony of society are maintained. It is the arrangement of rights and duties in a state to ensure that people will have just leaders, loyal citizens, and public tranquility. It implies the obedience of a nation to the laws of God, and the obedience of individuals to just authority. Without order, justice can rarely be enforced, and freedom cannot be maintained."

Again, that was a quote taken from American historian and political theorist Russell Kirk.

In our political tradition, we do not separate order from justice and freedom. Again, Kirk explains:

"'Justice' is the principle and the process by which each man is accorded the things that are his own—the things that belong to his nature. This concept the old Greeks and Romans expressed in the phrase 'to each his own.' It is the principle and the process that protects a man's life, his property, his proven rights, his station in life, his dignity. It also is the principle and the process that metes out punishment to the evildoer, which enforces penalties against violence and fraud. The allegorical figure of Justice always holds a sword. Justice is the cornerstone of the world—divine justice and human justice. It is the first necessity of any decent society.

"'Freedom' is the principle and the process by which a man is made master of his own life. It implies the right of all members of adult society to make their own choices in most matters. A slave is a person whose actions, in all important respects, are directed by others; a free man is a person who has the right—and the responsibility—of deciding how he is to live with himself and his neighbours."

So I say again, the most basic duty of government is to maintain orderly society. That is the foundation of justice and freedom. But if detention centres are inhumane and dangerous criminals are not being properly supervised, a government has failed to maintain an orderly society.

The current Liberal government and its supporters should ask themselves how they allowed this to happen. They should start by asking themselves why they allowed

appalling violence in detention centres to get out of control. How did they allow detention centres to become so badly crowded? Why are they over capacity? Why has it not occurred to the minister that crowded jails could, at least in theory, be combatted by reducing excessive wait times for corrections investigations and providing the resources necessary for staff in detention centres? Why is it not obvious that proper supervision and enforcement of probation and parole officers is absolutely essential? Why does no one seem to realize that it's high time the government did something by enforcing its own guidelines?

0930

This pre-election conversion just won't cut it. It's fooling no one.

Those recent reports that I mentioned paint a very grim picture indeed. Minor tinkering isn't going to fix the crisis in corrections. The government must take serious and thorough action immediately, not 10 years from now.

If you recall, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned that their plan is a 10-year plan. Well, I want to revert back to when the Attorney General, the former Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, stated that all detention centres and jails would have full-body scanners. Many do, but we're still waiting for the rest. As a result of that, violence, weapons and drugs still occur within our jails and our detention centres.

The bill before us is totally inadequate.

What does the bill propose? Let's get right into that now. First, the bill attempts to redefine what segregation means. Let me read from the bill. This is from Bill 6:

"Inmates held in conditions that constitute segregation or restrictive confinement retain all rights and privileges of inmates in general population housing except those that can only be enjoyed in association with other inmates.

"Certain inmates cannot be held in conditions that constitute segregation, including inmates who are pregnant, chronically self-harming or suicidal or who have significant mental illnesses or developmental disabilities. Inmates shall not be held in conditions that constitute segregation for more than 15 consecutive days or for more than 60 aggregate days in a 365-day period. The aggregate day maximum can be exceeded if authorized by a decision of the independent review panel. These limits do not apply in prescribed correctional institutions.

"Superintendents may hold inmates in non-disciplinary segregation in certain exceptional cases if all other options to manage the inmate have been exhausted. The superintendent shall maintain a record of the options that were exhausted before the inmate was held in those conditions. The superintendent shall also conduct a preliminary review of the case within 24 hours after they are placed in those conditions. Inmates being held in conditions that constitute segregation for non-disciplinary reasons must be offered the opportunity at regular intervals to associate with others.

"Provisions for regular visits by health care professionals to inmates held in conditions that constitute

segregation are provided. In particular, a member of the mental health care service team must review the inmate's mental health at least once every five days.

"A referral must be made to the independent regional chair to have a hearing before an independent review panel when an inmate has been held in conditions that constitute segregation for non-disciplinary reasons for either five or 10 consecutive days. A referral must also be made for any inmate held in conditions that constitute segregation when they reach 30 and 55 aggregate days of being held in those conditions.

"Upon receiving a referral, the chair shall convene an independent review panel to review the inmate's case and determine whether it is reasonable to continue holding the inmate in conditions that constitute segregation. The panel can also authorize a superintendent to continue to hold an inmate past the limit of 60 aggregate days in a 365-day period."

Mr. Speaker, let's just pause for a moment and simply break it down. The bill aims to redefine segregation as "any type of custody where an inmate is highly restricted in movement and association with others for 22 hours or more."

Certain inmates, such as those who are pregnant, mentally or physically ill, or even suicidal will be exempt from segregation. Segregation will be restricted to no more than 15 consecutive days, and no more than 60 aggregate days in the year. I've mentioned that before. Subject to review by whom? Ah, the independent review panel, which will be created by this bill and future regulations.

Here's the essence of the problem: My contacts within the world of corrections tell me, "This is a bad move." I looked at them and I said, "Really? Tell me why." The threat of segregation as a deterrent or its use as a punishment will be significantly reduced if the penalty for misbehaving will be predictably restricted to no more than 15 consecutive days and no more than 60 aggregate days in a year in segregation. Obviously, the legislation foresees the possibility of extending or prolonging segregation, but the precise details of this are vague, because they are left up to future regulations.

My friend Monte Vieselmeyer is chairman of the correctional division at OPSEU. Monte acknowledged that the bill addresses a number of corrections-related issues, including segregation. But after examining the bill, he said that correctional officers were still awaiting alternatives to segregation. This is what he had to say in a recent news release: "If the government wants to address segregation, they need to provide alternatives for the various reasons it's currently used. One inmate to one cell would solve the problem. In light of Canadian case law, we need answers."

What the bill describes sounds not only inadequate, but also just pretty bad. I'm referring to the plan to create the independent review panel. Leaving aside the fact that most of what it will do and how it will be staffed and so forth are left up to some future, undemocratic regulatory

process, this panel sounds like little more than a whole lot of paper-pushing and bureaucracy.

The independent review panel will review and decide cases of segregation after five and 10 consecutive days, and after 30 and 55 aggregate days of segregation over the course of a year. Here's the description of it from the preamble of Bill 6:

"A referral must be made to the independent regional chair to have a hearing before an independent review panel when an inmate has been held in conditions that constitute segregation for non-disciplinary reasons for either five or 10 consecutive days. A referral must also be made for any inmate held in conditions that constitute segregation when they reach 30 and 55 aggregate days of being held in those conditions.

"Upon receiving a referral, the chair shall convene an independent review panel to review the inmate's case and determine whether it is reasonable to continue holding the inmate in conditions that constitute segregation. The panel can also authorize a superintendent to continue to hold an inmate past the limit of 60 aggregate days in a 365-day period."

I hope my colleagues across the aisle are paying attention here. I don't even know if they've read their own legislation, but I digress.

The bill foresees an excessively bureaucratic process of report-writing, consultation and deliberation on inmates in segregation. The independent review panel would review and make decisions on cases of segregation at intervals of five, 10, 30 and 55 days of segregation over the course of a year—potentially 16 or more reports over the course of a year for simply one inmate. It should be immediately obvious why this is ridiculous.

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The independent review panel is obviously meant to address the abuse connected with the segregation of Adam Capay, who spent 1,560 days in solitary confinement awaiting trial in conditions so appalling that previous inmates had died there. What's the problem, you ask? Well, senior bureaucrats at the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services had been alerted more than 50 times about Capay's segregation, and the minister at the time had even visited Capay's cell and had seen for himself the horrendous conditions there. I mentioned this earlier, but it's worth repeating. I cannot overestimate the importance of what happened to Adam Capay. To the government's credit, they are attempting to rectify that.

If 50 reports and a personal visit from the minister didn't motivate the government to do something about Adam Capay and the horrendous conditions in which he had been confined, how will more bureaucracy and even more reports help? I digress, but they talk about being a green government, and yet they're killing trees with all the paperwork.

In this connection, I'm reminded of this quotation from John Maynard Keynes: "Government machinery has been described as a marvelous labour-saving device which enables 10 men to do the work of one."

There is also the famous Mr. Ronald Reagan, one of the greatest presidents of the United States of America. I might get some pushback from the other side, but I understand that. Here's what President Ronald Reagan said: "No government ever voluntarily reduces itself in size. Government programs, once launched, never disappear. Actually, a government bureau is the nearest thing to eternal life we'll ever see on this earth." He certainly did have a way with words, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, the Liberals are inclined to think that more bureaucracy is a solution to every problem, but I beg to differ on that. At best, all that the independent review panel will do is chew up and drain valuable resources. At worst, it may create a culture of excessive report writing in order to justify the existence of the independent review panel itself.

The fundamental problem is not the number or frequency of reports; it's the fact that in the case of Adam Capay, all the reports were ignored. So they develop an independent review panel that is going to create all these reports for one individual, and then what are they going to do with them? Is it going to be the same as Adam Capay: over 50 reports and they were ignored? More paper-pushing isn't going to solve that problem. Only a better, more attentive, more competent minister and staff will do that.

The present minister's attempts to dodge the questions about a dysfunctional parole system and the rest of the crisis in corrections is an appalling abnegation of her ministerial responsibility. "Ministerial responsibility" means that a minister is ultimately responsible for all actions of a ministry, whether he or she knows about it or not. It's called "staying on top of the files" and knowing what's going on—trusting in and communicating with those over whom you are in authority and ensuring that what is supposed to get done gets done in a timely fashion.

Ministerial responsibility is not a statute or a codified part of our Constitution. It's a part of our unwritten traditions. But this does not make it any less important. If waste, corruption or any other misbehaviour is found to have occurred within a ministry, the minister is ultimately responsible, even without knowledge of misdeeds or oversights by subordinates. The minister approved the hiring and continued employment of those people within the ministry.

If improper conduct occurred in a ministry, an honourable minister would feel compelled to resign. Obviously, that hasn't happened in this case, which is another indication that this government just doesn't take its work particularly seriously.

I've had this particular community safety and correctional services critic portfolio—and now my primary emphasis is on detention centres—I've had that responsibility for the last three and a half-plus years. I take my role very seriously. I've communicated: I've held blue ribbon panels; I've talked to COs; I've talked to probation and parole officers; I've talked to bailiffs; I've talked to nurses; I've talked to other staff involved in corrections.

They all say the same thing as well: It is the responsibility of the minister to ensure that what is said is followed up on, adhered to and delivered in a timely manner, and if there's any misdirection, then perhaps that minister should step aside. In fact, the minister's attitude and behaviour have seriously eroded ministerial responsibility and decreased the public's trust in government.

Mr. Speaker, really, I'm sorry to say that this half-baked piece of non-legislation isn't going to get the Liberal government out of the mess that they created and worsened. Again: It's not going to get the Liberals out of the mess that they created and even made worse.

Problems with the rest of the bill are basically similar to what I've just described. Let me repeat: Forcing bureaucrats to write more and more reports isn't going to do anything as long as ministers and their staff continue to ignore them. More reports and ignoring them isn't going to make the problems go away.

I've always been a firm believer in this: We come up with good ideas, but they're only good ideas if they're not acted upon. We need to ensure that we take good ideas and move them into action immediately. But hang on to your pens, because there's a whole lot more report writing a-comin'.

Lockdowns are a typical way of dealing with out-of-control cell block violence, especially in overcrowded detention centres. This government seems determined to put a stop to that practice and to introduce new and more onerous bureaucracy. According to the bill, if lockdowns last for five consecutive days, the superintendent must write a report, send it to the deputy minister and the inspector general. Superintendents must make and submit a new report for every subsequent day of the lockdown. Just to be clear, lockdowns occur because staff are outnumbered and unable to control cell block violence in overcrowded conditions. That is the root of the problem.

I'll stand here and I will defend the correctional officers' and the inmates' safety, but this bill doesn't talk about anything with regard to the safety of correctional officers. It's all about the inmates. I agree with that aspect of it, but where is the safety for correctional officers as well? They go into work every single day and they put their life on the line. Their motto is, "Everyone goes home safe." But to have the things that happen to them, when you talk about the abuse that occurs to those correctional officers, you talk about minor stabbings, being spat at, being assaulted—hit—having urine and feces thrown in their faces; that is an assault on human dignity. That has to stop.

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What happens to the inmates when that happens? A minor slap on the wrist. Nothing seems to happen to the inmates; yet, based on perhaps the health of an inmate—and I'm not talking mental health here—all of a sudden our COs who have been assaulted in those ways have to go through specific testing to ensure that they haven't contracted anything.

I digress, but with reason.

An inspector general will be established by an order in council. That person will have a broad mandate to review, report on and direct all treatment of inmates and conditions in prisons. Again, the big problem here is that legislation leaves all further details about the position to be defined in regulations. I get a little nervous about that.

We debate a bill, a low-information bill with all these wonderful phrases and all these wonderful ideas, but how specifically they're going to do that and/or when they're going to do it, "We'll leave that up to regulations." At which point, then, many of us don't even see the regulations. We're going to have no say, no input, no influence and no control over regulatory process. That's what's going to happen.

Get this: The inspector general is going to have a lot of work to do taking care of criminals and making sure they're comfortable. Why, you ask? The bill will require every inmate to have access to every kind of health care service. Inmates in segregation must receive daily visits from at least one member of a health care service team. This is better health care coverage and treatment than most Ontario families will ever get. It doesn't seem fair, does it? And a lot of people would be justifiably upset if they knew about it.

Mr. Speaker, it gets worse. It's as though this government thinks that every problem can be solved by more bureaucracy and report writing. I've talked about that already several times. Let me just say that if bureaucracy immunized us from problems, nothing would have ever gone wrong in Ontario.

Back to the bill: The bill provides for disciplinary hearings officers to be created by order in council. Their job will be to conduct hearings and to sanction serious misconduct by inmates. All further details are left to future regulation. Here's the relevant passage:

"An allegation of serious misconduct shall be referred to a disciplinary hearings officer. The officer conducts a hearing and may impose more significant disciplinary measures if he or she determines that the inmate has committed serious misconduct, including imposing conditions that constitute segregation for no more than 15 ... days. The inmate may seek to have a decision of the officer reviewed by another disciplinary hearings officer."

The silliest thing with this is that "serious misconduct" is nowhere defined in the bill. Once again, future regulations will determine what that means. Wow. "Serious misconduct" is nowhere defined in the bill. It's going to be left up to future regulations.

I can think of two problems with that right away. First, as I keep saying, the regulatory process is entirely undemocratic and this arbitrary government will be able to force whatever they want on the corrections community. Second, it's fundamentally irrational to leave undefined "serious misconduct" in a bill whose purpose is, at least in part, to make correctional officers safer when dealing with violent inmates and assault. This is obviously a major failure of the bill.

Front-line workers tell me that they feel that they are in danger. Correctional officers are outnumbered, and they have little recourse when they're attacked. Something needs to be done to keep front-line workers safe. This is why they are so alarmed that the bill seems to severely restrict the use of strip searches, instead stipulating conditions under which strip searches "may" occur, which is how the bill reads now. The bill should specify when they "shall" occur—that's in section 100 of Bill 6—otherwise, the act appears to limit the use of strip searches significantly.

I want to go back to this just for a moment, when we talk about how they feel that they're in danger. I've talked to many correctional officers. If they feel threatened, if an inmate moves towards them and they put their hand up to stop them—just to stop them—what happens? It's all on video, and because they feel that they are lacking management support, they could be remanded for having used excess force.

All they're doing is putting their hand out and stopping an inmate from coming towards them. That's excess force that constitutes an investigation? Some of these investigations: I've talked to correctional officers who have been relieved of their duties—many still being paid, but relieved of their duties—for in excess of a year.

Let me quote again from my friend Monte Vieselmeyer, OPSEU chairman of correctional division. I'm referencing a recent OPSEU media release, so we can have an idea of what our stakeholders are saying at this point: "We've done everything possible to make the government recognize the crisis in corrections and take immediate steps to alleviate it. The government finally agreed the system was in crisis and required a complete overhaul.

"However, we remain extremely concerned that the safety of front-line staff has not been clearly addressed in the bill," he continued. "The government has promised that no transformation can succeed without continuous feedback from staff. So we know they'll hear again and again about the vital need for significantly improved safety and security."

Mr. Vieselmeyer tells me that dangerously low staffing levels greatly increase the safety risk to front-line workers. "The government claims it's hired 1,100 new correctional officers. But they're fixed-term officers who fill in when regular officers are away. In reality, only 24 new correctional officers positions have been created."

Why increase the danger by restricting officers' ability to strip-search inmates and eliminate things like drugs and weapons? Just recently, down at EMDC, Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre, we've heard of more deaths down there, some related to drug overdose. Drugs are getting in. What can we do to stop it? Again, I repeat: Why increase the danger by restricting officers' ability to strip-search inmates and eliminate things like drugs and weapons?

Unsurprisingly, stakeholders within the CO and PPO community demand a zero-tolerance policy for violence, along with serious deterrents from and punishments for

assault. In fact, all my contacts tell me that they want the minister to do much more to protect the safety of front-line workers.

Let me draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to an important feature of the bill. There is a section of the bill called “duties of minister,” section 3. Front-line workers are adamant that this section include a duty to ensure a safe workplace for staff. Stakeholders report that investigations into misconduct take far too long, sometimes as long as 15 months. Investigations should be limited so that a CO can have his or her name cleared or be disciplined for more expediency. That’s in section 188 and following.

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But let me focus on something else, Mr. Speaker. Some major provisions of this bill seem unrealistic or impossible without the appropriate level of staffing. Let’s take some examples.

Exercise and work programs for rehabilitation or reintegration are, in principle, sound. That’s section 78(1). No one has an objection to that in principle, but institutions do not now have enough staff to make such programs possible everywhere. As I’ve already said, minor tinkering isn’t going to help the problem.

Stakeholders would prefer prisoners’ mail to be screened and read as a matter of routine, but the act suggests that this practice would occur only under certain circumstances. That’s in section 104(2). The same principle should also apply to telephone conversations and their duration—also section 104(10). In the same vein, the powers of inspection, section 119(1), are unnecessarily broad, and they appear to remove the few protections that workers currently have.

If I were feeling especially cynical, I would say that this government has decided that the needs and wants of incarcerated criminals are more important than the rights of correctional officers and that the order and safety of our detention centres are secondary to making criminals feel comfortable. Obviously, this legislation must be compliant with the written portion of our Constitution and our common-law traditions. But it must be said that corrections officers and all prison staff have rights as well.

So let me sum up. Ontario’s crisis in corrections has reached an inflexion point. There are staff shortages and overcrowding. Damaged facilities and understaffed nursing stations are commonplace in Ontario. My colleagues in the opposition and third party have been pointing this out for years and, now, about a month from a writ period, with an election looming, the Liberals want us to believe they’re experiencing a deathbed conversion.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say, I don’t buy it. And something tells me that the Premier lacks the sincerity of Oscar Wilde or Constantine the Great, who converted on their deathbeds.

This piece of legislation and the obscured 10-year timeline for implementation just isn’t going to cut it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was rather interesting listening to my colleague, and I found myself agreeing with big parts of what he had to say. I will always remember—I was in health care before coming here—that a few months after being elected, I took my first-ever visit of the Sudbury Jail. I’d never been there before. I have gone and visited many times since.

Coming out of the health care system, as I walked through the range, I would say, Speaker, that I recognized at least 80% of the people in jail. Why did I recognize them? Because they were all people I knew had a diagnosis of severe mental illness. How could we fail them so badly? The nursing station was a joke. Some of the tools they were working with, I had seen better and newer in my trip to the Republic of Congo, which had been given old equipment from Canada and had newer equipment there than we had in the Sudbury Jail. And the number of people working was completely inadequate.

There is also a very high rate of indigenous people in the Sudbury Jail. Like many indigenous people, many of them have diabetes. They will not get their sugar tested sometimes until four days after they are there, although we know they are people who are insulin-dependent and have active diabetes, because the resources are not there. I brought this up to the government 10 years ago, and now, 70 days before an election, they want us to believe that they care about what’s going on in there—never mind what it means to be a correctional officer in the Sudbury Jail, where their lunchroom looks like a shed with a light at the top. Nothing works. It is old. It is mouldy. Now they want us to believe that they want to help. I don’t buy it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Harinder Malhi: Mr. Speaker, there has been an overuse of segregation, especially for vulnerable inmates who have a significant mental illness or developmental disability, or who are pregnant.

Aligning with international standards to define segregation, we’ll be prohibiting segregation of our most vulnerable inmates.

To ensure that inmates get the health care services they need, we are proposing that inmates in segregation be visited daily by the superintendent and a member of the new health care services teams.

We are working hard to make sure that we support our inmates.

Improving the living conditions in our institutions is critical to our transformation, as it strikes at the heart of safety, human rights and the dignity of all inmates within our system. These minimum standards would include reasonable access to natural light, fresh air, adequate bedding and a clean environment.

The proposed legislation would give the opportunity for at least two in-person visits with a family member or friend.

The proposed changes include defining searches of inmates in legislation. The legislation outlines the circumstances for when each type of search can take place,

and would ensure that all searches, including strip searches, follow a prescribed process.

This transformation will not be complete until we provide the necessary and appropriate supports to indigenous people and racialized populations, who are over-represented in our correctional facilities. To achieve this, we are proposing a number of changes to build cultural competency and increase supports.

We are committed to reforming our systems. We are committed to making sure that people have the dignity and freedom and rights that they deserve for safety and health care, and we're working hard to do that here in our correctional system right now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I wish to thank the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex for his excellent advocacy, not only on behalf of his constituents but also for those critic portfolios that he fulfills. This particular area, I think it's fair to say, having heard the speech this morning, is an area that he's very, very passionate about—in not only helping inmates and helping offenders and helping those who are feeling the pressures of 15 years of Liberal government, but also correctional officers and those who put their safety and well-being on the line in these institutions to help provide safe streets and help provide safer communities for all of our ridings.

He really brought up a lot of important points and ones that I heard a couple of weeks ago when I had meetings with various correctional officers at my constituency office in Niagara West—Glanbrook, but also recently here at Queen's Park. They brought up, again, this crisis in corrections. This is indeed a crisis in corrections, where we're hearing about officers who are being routinely abused in these situations, who are not being given the adequate tools, who are being drastically understaffed and underfunded.

When we look at things such as overcrowding, which was mentioned as well, it's really atrocious.

Back in Niagara, we have the Niagara Detention Centre, where we had a dorm that was built for 12 offenders in 1973, I believe it was. Later on, they put bunk beds onto that so that they could fit 24 into this facility. The floor size had not changed. Then, they put that up to 36. And today they have over 40 people in an institution that was built for 12 people. Keeping over 40 offenders in this type of area is definitely putting pressures on the system.

The Liberal government has had 15 years to get it right. They haven't done anything until the last minute. Ontarians deserve change.

I'm proud to support my colleague's debate this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I think we all have examples about how our corrections facilities have been understaffed for the past number of years. The Monteith correctional centre that's in my area—it's in John

Vanthof's riding, but a lot of the people who go there, unfortunately, and some who work there live in my riding. I've got to say that, meeting with Ken Steinbrunner and others who work at that institution, it's a real problem. There's not enough staff on a shift in order to properly staff the jail, so as a result, inmates get less yard time. They're not going to be able to meet the requirements of this new legislation because there isn't staff.

What the jail people have been saying is that we need to increase the number of staff in order to be able to make sure that the mandate set out in legislation can be followed as far as keeping the jails secure and ensuring that jails are safe. It's probably, I'm told, around 20%. There needs to be about a 20% increase in staff just on the corrections side, not to talk about the probation side, because the probation side is 300 people short when it comes to being able to do what needs to be done so that people on probation are seen by probation officers.

I'm told by some in the system there are people who get probation for two years and never see a probation officer because there aren't enough probation officers to go along. Why? Because the Liberals have done to corrections what they have done in health care and others. They have underfunded the system; they have allowed it to fail.

Now I hear the Tories being the champions of OPSEU. They're lock-step brothers and sisters: "We're together with you; we bought the Kool-Aid." These guys are about privatization. They are not going to fix the system. I don't believe it for one second because I lived under Mike Harris as a member in this place, and I remember when he tried to privatize corrections the last time. Do you think that the Tories, under the current leadership, are going to go and do what needs to be done within the context of a public system? Absolutely not. They will privatize it or they will underfund it and allow it to fail.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. I return to the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I want to thank the member from Nickel Belt, the Minister of the Status of Women, Niagara West—Glanbrook and the member from Timmins—James Bay.

I want to address very quickly this item of privatization. Nowhere, anywhere has this party, this go-around, talked anything about privatization. That is purely a myth. When I take a look back at when the NDP were in power back in 1990 to 1995, the debt, the 126-year debt, was only about \$30 billion, but when they left five years later they had tripled the debt to over \$90 billion. So I don't think they have a lot of room to talk.

I will also suggest this, Mr. Speaker: I've been the critic for this particular portfolio for three and a half years, and I take it very, very seriously. I've had countless, countless hours spent, including visitations to various detention centres, phone calls and different meetings with them. There is a very serious crisis in corrections. I mentioned earlier this morning—we talked

about this hashtag, #FixIt. That's what needs to be done right now. Bill 6 is a long way from trying to fix the problems in our corrections and our probation and parole.

Having spoken with Scott McIntyre, he said, "Rick, we don't need 100 more probation and parole officers throughout the province; we need 300 more, because when you take a look at the fact that there are over 45,000 individuals who are out on probation and parole and being forced to self-report, many don't even do that, and 60% of that 45,000 is somewhere in the neighbourhood between medium- and high-risk offenders."

That's not keeping our communities safe at all. They have taken the word "community" out of this legislation. I believe that what this government has managed to do is handcuff our COs and our PPOs so they can't get their job done.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity of having to address this issue with my one-hour leadoff this morning.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): This House is in recess until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to introduce Natalie Richardson, the managing director of Save Your Skin and a constituent from Meaford in the great riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, and Ferg Devins, who is with Bladder Cancer Canada. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: If you'll bear with me this morning, our page captain is Tamsyn King, and she has brought half of the population of Windsor-Tecumseh with her today: her mother, Marla Jackson; her father, Kevin King; her stepfather, John Parent; her sister Alysha King, who is a page in training; her grandmother Gloria Jackson, who we know as Gigi; her grandparents Margret and Frank King, who are Nana and Papa; and their family friend Sue DeLisle. Thank you and welcome to Queen's Park this morning.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Today I would like to welcome Jaymee Maaghop from the Canadian Cancer Survivor Network. I would also like to welcome Ferg Devins from Bladder Cancer Canada, as well as Natalie Richardson, Louise Binder and Cass Richardson, who are here with the Save Your Skin Foundation. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to welcome Josh Underwood, an impressive young man from my riding. He is very interested in government, and I'm glad that he's taken the opportunity to be here today and learn more about the Legislature first-hand. I want to say welcome to Queen's Park, Josh.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): He's 14, and he wants to be an MPP next year?

Further introductions.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have two good friends here today. They're actually from the riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore. They are Deana and Chelsea Siemon. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I want to acknowledge that on Monday, April 2, it is World Autism Awareness Day, and I want to acknowledge my friend Sarah Severn, my personal bagpiper, who brought it to my attention. I know she's watching today. Welcome, Sarah. Thank you for all your support.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm pleased today to have guests in the gallery of my star staffer Rebecca Hubble. Her mother, Roberta Hubble, is here today, and Rebecca's brother James is here today, wearing his University of Ottawa jersey. It's great to have you.

Hon. Charles Sousa: It gives me great pleasure to introduce Michele Hirak Fletcher. She is the mother of our page Aidan Fletcher, who is here today. And Susan Westwater, the teacher of Aidan, and his classmates from grade 8 from Tecumseh Public School, will be in the gallery later this morning.

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure, with page captain Sophie Andrew-Joiner, who is from Parry Sound-Muskoka, to introduce her family, who are here today. Her mother, Cynthia Andrew; her brother Nicholas Andrew-Joiner; and her grandmother Susan Andrew are all here in the public gallery this morning. Welcome.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I would be remiss if I didn't introduce my cousins who are making their way here today from Newfoundland: Janice and Charles Moores. I'll welcome them to Queen's Park as well.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It's nice to introduce one friend of mine and three new friends of mine: Wayne Baker from the riding of Perth-Wellington; his daughter Rachel Baker, who was a page here at one time; and Andy Galambos. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I would be remiss not to also recognize Ferg Devins. We worked together when I worked for the Beer Store. Have a Molson-joyable day.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: On behalf of my colleague the member from Wellington-Halton Hills, it's my pleasure to welcome Denise Roy, the father of page Mikayla.

Hon. Daiene Vernile: I'm delighted to welcome to Queen's Park today, from the great riding of Kitchener Centre, Rebecca Wagner, who also serves as my EA in my constituency office. Welcome, Rebecca.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): With us in the Speaker's gallery today are guests of mine, who will be joining us shortly.

The two who are here are the former mayor of Toronto and public servant deluxe with many hats and roles—Barbara Hall is here with us; welcome, Barbara, and thank you for being here—and Stanley Ho. Thank you, Stanley, for joining us.

Joining them shortly will be the former member from Toronto Centre-Rosedale during the 37th and 38th Parliaments, and MPP for Toronto Centre in the 39th Parliament, former MPP George Smitherman.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Acting Premier. Yesterday's election document is proof this government will say anything, do anything and promise anything to cling to power. The government promised to balance the budget. Instead, their desire to cling to power will doom Ontario to six more years of deficits just to announce election promises that no one trusts they will ever keep, \$2 billion in new taxes on families and businesses, and skyrocketing debt that will further dilute the services that families need.

Does this government really believe that votes are for sale in Ontario?

Hon. Charles Sousa: This government believes that the priorities of Ontarians are first and foremost in any work that we do. In the last number of budgets that I've had the privilege of delivering—this is the sixth now—we've built in progressive measures while still growing the economy. This budget is about promoting more care when it comes to health care, mental health and addiction, child care and seniors' care.

On the other side, we're implementing measures to stimulate growth to support businesses, to continue to be the leanest government anywhere in Canada and to grow our economy stronger.

The members opposite have voted against those very progressive measures. We have balanced the budget, we have a surplus of \$600 million, and we're going to continue fighting for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Acting Premier: Ontario families and businesses will be paying billions more in taxes as a result of this throw-it-against-the-wall-and-see-what-sticks election document. Some 1.8 million people will be paying more in taxes. This is a personal income tax increase that will take \$275 million out of families' pockets. The government is adding to the employer health tax, hurting 20,000 businesses. They will each pay \$2,400 more a year; that's \$45 million in taxes.

Speaker, if the government is raising taxes by \$2 billion just weeks before an election, just imagine what they will do if they get re-elected.

Hon. Charles Sousa: In the 2016 budget, we made it clear that we're going to eliminate the surtax, a hidden tax on tax, to benefit Ontarians. Over 700,000 more will be paying less.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talks about people's money in people's pockets. In this budget, we are providing \$17,000 per child who requires child care and over \$1,000 more for seniors who require support. We will continue to provide help where needed, especially for those who need developmental services.

The member opposite is talking about mirroring the federal government's tax provisions for the highest payers. Obviously, he thinks it's okay for the biggest

governments, the biggest banks in our community, not to pay their fair share. We're—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

I've heard a few comments from the opposition side that I would normally jump up and say are not to be said and are to be withdrawn. I will, from now on. People know better than that.

Final supplementary.

1040

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Acting Premier: One of the key admissions, on page 224, is that there are "efficiencies" to be found in the Ontario government: \$1.425 billion in efficiencies, to be precise. Over four years, that first year alone of efficiencies equals \$6 billion. When you add the second, third and fourth year, that's \$14.4 billion of annualized efficiencies that the Liberals are promising. But when the PCs say "efficiencies," they scream "cuts," but it's in their own budget.

Speaker, if this undisciplined, spendthrift government can show \$14.4 billion in efficiencies, can you imagine what Doug Ford and the PCs are going to find?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, there's the crux of the matter. We have made it clear that we are the leanest government anywhere in Canada. We find transformations where possible. We find savings of almost \$2 billion every year, and we exceed our targets year over year. That's how we slayed the deficit and that's how we've come to balance. We are going to come back to balance because we've put a lot of prudence and reserves into our system.

They're not just sawing into fat. If they're taking our numbers and they're saying that they're going to be able to provide even more cuts—because that's what they're talking about, cuts to services and programs—they're going to saw into bone. They're going to put people in harm's way. They're going to put our economy in harm's way.

We are going to continue to support those who need it, and we're going to grow the economy.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): After row 1, we're in warnings.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We're in warnings. New question.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Acting Premier, who just admitted to \$14.4 billion in cuts.

Of real concern to Ontario businesses and families should be this government's dismal economic outlook. The budget projects \$1 billion less in corporate revenues every year due to "increased economic uncertainty"

caused by US corporate tax cuts. So the US cuts taxes to make them more competitive, and our government raises taxes. Their answer is to run us deep into deficits, hike taxes and make life more unaffordable for families.

Why is this government doing the absolute opposite of what is needed to create jobs in Ontario?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Well, let's talk about making life more affordable for Ontarians. This budget is all about putting more money in people's pockets. We're providing free preschool—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton is warned.

Finish, please.

Hon. Charles Sousa: We're providing free preschool child care. That's \$17,000 per child for a young family.

We're providing OHIP+, universal pharmacare for every child and young adult 25 and under and every senior 65 and over.

We're now providing an Ontario drug and benefit plan that will provide \$700 per family that otherwise would not have had it.

We're lowering the commuting costs with the transit system here in the southern corridor. But in the Far North, we're providing more supports to help them as well, with free tuition for every student who qualifies, now that we've increased it.

Mr. Speaker, they're going to vote against the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Acting Premier: As CTV reported, "This budget had nothing for small businesses, those owners were looking for some kind of relief...." In the 2019 budget, they got nothing.

As the Coalition of Concerned Manufacturers and Businesses of Ontario rightly said, "True to form, the Wynne Liberals did not support Ontario businesses in the budget ... not acceptable, not right, not going to be tolerated."

This government has teamed up with Prime Minister Trudeau to attack small businesses. This isn't acceptable. Why have the Liberals turned their backs on the engine of Ontario's economy?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The province of Ontario is the engine of Canada. We provide well over 40% of Canada's economy. We have the lowest unemployment rate in two decades. We've provided over 811,000 net new jobs, and in this budget we're supporting 140,000 jobs every year through our record levels of infrastructure spending to support businesses and to ensure that we are competitive. That's why we're providing for more apprenticeship programs, skills and training. That's why we're accelerating our Jobs and Prosperity Fund, to attract that foreign direct investment. We are still tops in North America when it comes to that, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the member opposite talks about small business. Of course we're supporting small business. Even the employer health tax is supporting them. And we've reduced their taxes by 22%. The member opposite

recognizes—or should recognize—that the private sector matters to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Acting Premier: Ontario families aren't the only ones concerned. This government's own expert witness at the pre-budget hearings, Craig Alexander of the Conference Board of Canada, weighed in yesterday. He said, "There really isn't a rationale for running deficits" right now.

Douglas Porter, the chief economist at BMO, said, "Ideally you would like to see government finances in relatively strong shape"—

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: In 15 years of Bill Davis, not one balanced budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. The Minister of Infrastructure is warned.

Finish, please.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: "Ideally you would like to see government finances in relatively strong shape when we hit that heavy weather."

Only the PCs will bring back manufacturing jobs and restore fiscal responsibility in Ontario.

Why is this government writing cheques that are going to bounce?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Donald Trump.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Barrie is warned.

Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: All right. Mr. Speaker, here's a history lesson on the PCs: In the last 40 years, there have only been eight balanced budgets. The PCs only delivered three. We did the rest.

When it came time to support our manufacturing sector that was in trouble during the greatest recession in history, they said it was corporate welfare. They did not support our auto industry.

When it came to Stelco, we supported our steel industry.

When it comes to servicing the debt, of which almost three quarters is for infrastructure and capital investment, they are voting against supporting construction of roads and bridges and transit that matter to our competitiveness. Our interest to service the debt is lower today than it was when they were in power by almost half.

DENTAL CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. Can the Acting Premier tell us what it costs to get a regular cleaning done at the dentist?

Hon. Charles Sousa: It's a fair question, and I understand where the member is coming from. We recognize that dental plans are important, especially for those who don't have them. It is why we've introduced the Ontario Drug and Dental Program for those who don't have those

benefits. We are going to continue to support our young people through these programs.

We've provided now free pharmacare for a much larger formulary than the member opposite was suggesting, and we're doing that for seniors as well.

When it comes to those who don't have those benefit plans, we're starting off by providing them at least \$700 per family. We know more can be done, and we're going to continue to support that program.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I can let him know that it's at least \$100 for a regular cleaning. Can the Acting Premier tell us how much it costs to have a cavity filled?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, do you know what it costs for a young family with toddlers and they need to have them put in daycare and they can't afford it? \$17,000 is what this province is going to be able to provide for those families. We're going to continue supporting those families that are most in need.

I recognize that we can always do more and we are going to continue to build upon the very things we put forward. We're going to continue providing more health care, more pharmacare, more seniors' care, more mental health and addictions care and more supports for families, putting more money in their pockets.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: A cavity would be about \$200, so that's about \$300 total for a regular cleaning and to have one cavity filled—a pretty standard visit to the dentist.

Can the Acting Premier tell us how the Liberal plan to reimburse \$50 per child per year for dental work in Ontario would cover this one average visit to the dentist?

1050

Hon. Charles Sousa: That family that has a young child who needs cavities filled will now have more money in their pocket, because they're saving \$17,000 on child care, Mr. Speaker. We're supporting the families of this province. They should be supporting this budget as well.

DENTAL CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Acting Premier: Can the Acting Premier tell us how much it costs to have a tooth pulled?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member, again, is asking about the requirements to enhance our dental plan. I get it: We're providing lots of supports for the families of this province, including dental plans. We will continue to support them.

If you want to pull my teeth, by all means. I recognize that the province needs to support the people of this province, and we are doing just that in this budget and in our plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I can enlighten the Acting Premier: For a simple extraction, it's about

\$140; for something more complicated, it can be as much as \$250.

Does the Acting Premier know how much it costs to have four impacted wisdom teeth removed or to have a root canal on a back tooth done?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Does the member opposite know what it costs to provide drug plans for those that are chronically in need of that plan, which you are not providing in your plan? That is money that will go to the people of our province. As I say again, seniors are going to get \$1,000 more because of the programs we're putting in, and young families are going to get substantively more in order to support their children.

I understand: We need and want to support the people of this province. We are putting forward a plan that is sustainable and is costed, Mr. Speaker, in order to enable them to get the services and programs they need.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, it's about \$1,000 to have wisdom teeth taken out, and that is without any complications at all. A root canal on a back tooth can cost as much as \$900.

Can the Acting Premier tell us how the Liberal plan to reimburse just \$300 for an average Ontario adult per year would cover the cost of a \$900 root canal?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member, again, is talking about the cost to families of a range of issues. It's not just dental plans that cost families more money; there is a degree of burden that we're trying to support, and they're shouldering that burden. But families, as well as businesses, do encumber costs. We on this side of the House want to make certain that we take a balanced approach to offset some of those costs in order for them to be better off. The net benefit from this plan is more money in their pockets to support them by way of our savings.

The member opposite can pinpoint one particular instance, and if they have low income and if they're unable to support themselves, if there are emergency requirements, we do have universal health care. We're sustaining it and we're building upon it. The member opposite knows that. There are other issues that are in this budget that they should be supporting for the benefit of the people of this province.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ross Romano: My question is for the Acting Premier. On page 191 of the budget, the Liberal projections are astounding. They are flat-out admitting that their policies are going to kill job creation. In fact, under the Liberals, job creation would be cut in half within the next three years. Northern Ontario needs more jobs, not less. My question is: How can this Liberal government write off job creation for the sake of trying to win an election?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member for his question. I'm a little bit confused as to why he could take the content from yesterday's budget and come to any conclusion other than the fact that our government and our Premier continue to be extremely positive and supportive of programs and funding that will, on a strategic basis, help support more job creation in this province.

I know I've said this many times in the Legislature, Speaker, but since the depths of the recessionary low a decade ago, our province has created more than 800,000 jobs. Our unemployment rate today stands lower than it has at any other point for the last 17 years. We've been below the national average for 33 or 34 consecutive months. In part, that's because of the strategic investments that our government has made through programs like the Jobs and Prosperity Fund.

In yesterday's budget, which I would be happy to elaborate on in the follow-up answer, there was significantly more funding provided over the next three years to continue to help us strategically invest in the people who are helping build up this province. I'll elaborate in a quick moment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Ross Romano: Back to the Acting Premier: Again, the Liberals come clean with another astounding fact: They're admitting that we will be less competitive than the United States. They cite recent tax reforms in the US as just one of the examples why. I represent a border city, and our economies are intrinsically linked, Mr. Speaker. We can't afford Liberal policies that will drive jobs across the border instead of keeping them in Ontario.

My question is, why will this Premier accept the fact that US tax reforms will make us less competitive? Why will she not help make Ontario prosperous and open for business?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I really don't understand how a province could be considered any more open for business than Ontario given the incredible economic story we have to tell here in this province.

Specifically in the budget that was tabled yesterday, over the next three years, there will be \$935 million, if the budget is passed, in new investments to specifically support something that we're calling the Good Jobs and Growth Plan. For example, in order to help build Ontario's talent advantage, we'll be investing \$411 million over three years specifically to work closely with employers, colleges and universities to help people find a job, retain that job or get a better job. We're going to be renewing the Jobs and Prosperity Fund with an increase of \$900 million over the next 10 years, for a grand total of \$3.2 billion since 2014-15. There are a series of other funds that will be embedded within that extended or expanded Jobs and Prosperity Fund.

All of this, Speaker, is part of how we've set the table over the last number of years for that economic success story that Ontario has become. We'll continue to make the right investments.

I would call on the member from Sault Ste. Marie and the Ontario Conservative Party to stand with us and support our business community so they can continue to create jobs in this province.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Acting Premier. I'm currently the agriculture critic for the NDP and I'm proud to represent a rural riding, but I will always be a farmer. I listened very closely to the finance minister's speech, and not once did I hear the word "agriculture" or "farmer" or "farm," so I read the document. Through the text of the document, those words were missing.

Why does it seem that the Liberal government is forgetting the cornerstone of our agri-food industry?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'm going to allow the supplementary to go to the Minister of Agriculture, but let me very clearly state this: Even in the speech yesterday I talked at length about the tremendous diversification of our economy and the importance for us to continue to advance in those investments.

One of the biggest ones of all is agri-food processing. We have a beverage and food fund that's all about agriculture and our rural communities. We introduced it in the budget. It's meant to ensure that we continue to grow that. It's one of the biggest contributors to our GDP; I recognize that.

Furthermore, we just recently announced support for rural communities through engagement in our horse racing industry to secure that market as well.

When you look at all the products that are produced by this province—the best quality around the world—they include as well agriculture and fishing, which are major exports. We recognize that importance, and that's why we're working alongside other markets to ensure that we can continue to support the industry.

Mr. Speaker, we're very proud of our agricultural sector and the people of Ontario in our rural communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again to the Acting Premier: For years, farmers have been asking for an increase to the RMP program, which has been capped by the government. It was missing from the budget. For years, they've been waiting for an expansion of the product insurance program. Funds for that were missing from the budget.

The only really significant mention directly to the farm sector was that you were going to lobby your federal cousins for assistance for the damage that was going to be caused to the agri-food sector by the TPP. You're asking for the feds to support agriculture in the budget document. Where is your support for the agricultural sector?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Jeff Leal: It goes without saying, the profound respect that I have for the member for Timiskaming—Cochrane. But let me share a few things. He talks about the Risk Management Program in the province of Ontario. We've ensured that there will be \$100 million each and every year for that program. At the advice of the stakeholders, we're doing a review of the RMP program in the province of Ontario to make sure that every one of those dollars goes where it's needed within the non-supply-managed sector of Ontario's ag economy. It was Ontario that took the initiative on a national basis to reform the national business risk management program for farmers here in Ontario to make sure that they meet Ontario farmer needs in the non-supply-managed sector.

1100

There has never been anything that I've had the opportunity to defend more than Ontario's supply-managed sector, whether it's talks in Mexico City, whether it was talks in Montreal or whether it's the talks that are upcoming in Washington, because we want to make sure that that stays intact.

With regard to our Jobs and Prosperity Fund, we'll continue to invest in the agri-food sector in Ontario, which is a driver of the largest sector in Ontario's economy today: \$37.5 billion and 800,000 jobs predicated on 15,000 family farms in the province of Ontario.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question this morning is to the Minister of Finance, and I want to start off by congratulating him on tabling his sixth budget.

The budget that was released yesterday has a focus on care and opportunity for the people of Ontario, and it includes significant new investments in health care, child care, home care and mental health. The budget also focuses on initiatives that make life more affordable and provide more financial security during this time of rapid economic change.

On this side of the House, we've taken significant measures to invest in more care and build opportunity for the people of Ontario. From my budget breakfast this morning with stakeholders from Davenport, I can tell you they are pretty excited with what we have announced in the budget.

We have made prescriptions free for everyone under 25 and over 65; we've made tuition free for over 225,000 students; and now we've made child care free for children aged two and a half until they are eligible for kindergarten. We know these investments will benefit all people in Ontario.

Can the minister please provide more details on the fiscal plan that supports these investments?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you to the member from Davenport. As you know and she mentioned, this is the sixth budget which I've had the privilege of delivering for the people of Ontario. Each year we plan for the long-term success of this province.

A balanced budget is by no means an end in itself; it's a means to an end, and the end is a stronger Ontario. That's why we're using our fiscal strength to invest more in our people and our businesses here in our province. We're investing more, but with fiscal prudence in mind. We do have a path to balance. We have a prudent and sustainable plan to track back to balance, and at the same time, we ensure that we have a sufficient amount of prudence and reserves and contingencies for any shocks to the system.

And we'll do it again. We'll provide for a balanced approach, but not at the expense of the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Back to the Minister of Finance: I'm pleased that the minister has chosen to invest in the care that Ontarians depend on, including the 225,000 students who are benefiting from free tuition, while creating more opportunities for the hard-working people of this province to share in our economic prosperity. I know that this government has a history of balancing investments with fiscal prudence, which is why I'm pleased to see that there is a path to balance. I know Ontario's fiscal position remains strong without cutting and slashing the services that Ontarians depend on. In fact, many of the investments made in the budget will grow our economy by investing in the people of this province.

Can the minister please remind this House what we are doing to create more opportunity in this province while balancing fiscal prudence?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member for Davenport has it right, Mr. Speaker. The government has always taken a fiscally responsible approach. We've invested wisely, bringing this province out of recession, and we've done this by investing and continuing to invest in Ontarians. It's why we're making sure that the peak deficit remains low, at 0.8% of GDP.

We're making more strategic investments, like child care, that provide more choice for Ontarians; more drug and dental programs to keep families healthier; as well as the healthy home program for seniors so they can be more independent longer; and investing nearly \$1 billion over the next three years for our Good Jobs and Growth Plan.

Through this, we will build our talent advantage, increase our business competitiveness, drive our trade, and invest in our infrastructure to the tune of \$230 billion over 14 years, a record level of investment that will build a legacy of opportunity for generations to come.

GOVERNMENT FISCAL POLICIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Minister of Finance as well. We are 69 days out from an Ontario election. Right now, the Liberals are touring the province on the taxpayer dime, throwing money at everything that they ignored over the past 15 years. This government continues to show that they will say and do anything in order to cling to power.

Just last year, the Wynne Liberals were committed to, and promised, years of balanced budgets. But yesterday, they announced a \$6.7-billion deficit, not for this year, but for this year, next year, the year after that, the year after that, the year after that, and likely to infinity if they continue to be in government.

My question: Why is this government so committed to clinging to power that they have thrown out any fiscal responsibility in their books? How does that minister look at his friends on Bay Street?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we have just come out of the largest recession in our history. We've taken the appropriate steps to not make across-the-board cuts, as advocated by the opposition. We continue to move—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Niagara West—Glanbrook is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Charles Sousa: We slayed the deficit, we balanced the budget, and we have a surplus of \$600 million.

Now we have a choice before us, Mr. Speaker. As the economy is growing slower than anticipated, do we cut those very services and programs? Or do we invest more in hospitals, in roads and bridges, in schools and in child care? Do they want to cut the services that Ontarians depend upon and rely upon? Do they want to cut those programs that stimulate economic growth for the province?

I say no. We're going to invest, we're going to grow, and we're going to support the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I can fix his response for him, Speaker. What we really have in front of us is a \$6.7-billion deficit. He has projected \$14.4 billion in efficiencies, or, as he likes to call them, "cuts." We have a \$325-billion debt, and our debt interest payments are out of control. The Ontario credit card is maxed out thanks to that minister and that government.

The Liberals had 15 years to fix all of these problems, but only now, 69 days before an election, do they even want to pretend to fix them.

On this side of the aisle, we are ready to fight for hard-working Ontarians and put money back into the pockets of everyday people rather than take \$2 billion of taxes out.

So I ask the honourable member one more time: Why doesn't this government help hard-working Ontario taxpayers? And why do they continue to ring up deficit after deficit after deficit after deficit after deficit?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It might be sooner than you think.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Okay, I'll just get out of here now.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good idea. Have a coffee—no, no; decaf.

Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member opposite wants to remind us of the deficits that the Progressive Conservative have had in this province. For over 40 years, there have only been eight balanced budgets; only three were from the Conservatives.

The member is now criticizing that we're the leanest government anywhere in Canada because of the transformations we've made to be more productive. The member wants people to feel that it's wrong that we are the largest growth economy, almost in the world. The member opposite doesn't like the fact that we have the lowest unemployment in two decades; we're almost at full capacity. The member opposite totally ignores that the GDP of our province is one of the largest in the world, and our debt-to-GDP is manageable.

Furthermore, she talks about the cost of that debt. I agree, and it's why we have taken the steps necessary to lower that overall cost. When they were in power, 15.5 cents of every dollar went to pay interest; today, it's only 8 cents.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre des Finances.

The people of northeastern Ontario have been waiting almost a decade for a PET scanner. Our community raised millions of dollars. We've done our part.

1110

Back in December 2015, this government promised to get a PET scanner up and running in Sudbury, but today we are still waiting. Yesterday's budget was one more disappointment in a long legacy of disappointments from this Liberal government.

Why does the minister's final budget completely ignore the need for a PET scanner to service the people of northeastern Ontario?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Health.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Of course, I know this is an issue that has been of some concern to the member opposite.

Before I go into the details of the PET scanner for Sudbury, I just want to say that I am so proud to be part of a government that is making a deliberate choice to invest and to continue to invest in care for the people of Ontario by investing more in health care, hospitals, home care, mental health, long-term care and, indeed, dental care.

As it relates to the Sudbury PET scanner—and I know our member from Sudbury has been very involved with this as a great advocate with the former Minister of Health—we have been investing some \$4.6 million in capital spending to build additional space at Health Sciences North for the new PET/CT scanner. This is in addition to the \$1.6 million that was announced in December 2015 to cover the operating costs for the scanner at Health Sciences North, which is still on track.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Since 2009, tens of thousands of people—municipal leaders, First Nations leaders and

church leaders—have been calling on this Liberal government to help us get a PET scanner in Sudbury.

The Sam Bruno family, a grieving family, has done the impossible: They have raised over \$4 million to purchase the scanner. Health Sciences North has done everything that you've asked them to do, but we are still waiting. Northerners had to drive for up to seven or eight hours on poorly maintained, icy roads all of last winter to get the care they needed in southern Ontario.

Why does this final budget do nothing to change that and do nothing to get a PET scanner up and running in Sudbury?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise to talk about the PET scanner that we are getting in Sudbury. Yes, Mr. Speaker, that PET scanner is coming. That is thanks to this government. We worked with the community. We made sure that we listened to the concerns. The community of Sudbury asked for a permanent PET scanner, and that's what our community is getting, not the mobile PET scanner that she advocated for. We're making sure that we've got a permanent PET scanner. It's going to be on track and it's going to open up before the end of 2018.

I'm very proud of this government and our investments in health care and that the community of Sudbury is getting that PET scanner.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Yesterday, our government introduced a budget which includes significant investments in health care. In fact, the 2018 budget increases health care spending by 5% to reduce wait times, provide access to care and enhance the patient experience. Most importantly, this budget includes funding for priority health care services that will have a real impact on Ontario families.

This budget invests in our hospitals, in mental health, in our long-term-care homes, in home care and in our world-class health care professionals.

We know that the people of Ontario want to age in their communities in the comfort of their homes. I myself have told my children that I intend to be home until Steckley funeral home comes to get me.

Can the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please inform this House of the investments our government is making in home and community care?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you to the member from Barrie for giving me the opportunity to discuss our government's plan to provide more care at home and in the community.

As our population ages, our government has made it a priority to improve home and community care so that patients can receive care in settings that are as comfortable and convenient for them as possible. That's why we're investing \$230 million in home and community care. That means that there will be 2.8 million more

hours of personal support, the equivalent of 1,400 full-time positions; 284,000 more nursing visits; and 58,000 more therapy visits. We're also providing \$175 million to create 20 new hospices within three years. I want to thank my parliamentary assistants for that initiative.

These investments will keep people out of hospital and help more people get the care they need, at or close to home and in the community.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Minister, for that response, and thank you to the minister and the Premier for all their hard work and dedication, ensuring access to high-quality care across the health sector.

We all know how valuable our skilled, compassionate health care workers are. Our 2018 budget would provide an additional \$822 million for hospitals, to ensure that they have the resources to continue doing an incredible job of caring for our loved ones. It also provides \$300 million over three years to increase staffing in long-term care homes. That means every long-term care home in the province will benefit from an additional registered nurse on staff.

We also heard yesterday that our government is investing in one of the largest groups in our health workforce: personal support workers. Can the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please share with this House what our budget is proposing to support PSWs?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you again to the member for that question. I know the third party is particularly interested in this topic, as they asked a question on this topic yesterday.

We do know how critical PSWs are to the health and well-being of Ontarians. As the population ages and more medically complex clients require care, the role of PSWs in our health care system will continue to be critical. That is why, over the next three years, we will invest \$23 million to add 5,500 PSWs to the workforce in underserved communities, a \$38-million training and education fund for new and existing PSWs that will ensure that they have the tools they require to support our loved ones, and a \$65-million investment over three years in retirement security for PSWs.

It's so vital that we recognize and support PSWs as trusted and valued members of the health care team, and we're committed to supporting them to provide quality care to our most vulnerable Ontarians, wherever they may live.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. Tucked away on the last page of the budget papers document tabled in this House yesterday—in fact, the last paragraph in the budget papers—was an indication that the government intends to amend “the Climate Change Mitigation and Low-carbon Economy Act with respect to the reimbursement of expenditures incurred by the crown for the

purposes of funding initiatives that are reasonably likely to reduce or support the reduction of greenhouse gas.”

“Reasonably likely”? Give us a break. Will the minister finally admit that this is proof positive that their carbon tax policy is nothing more than a Liberal slush fund?

Hon. Chris Ballard: Thank you to the member opposite for that question. When it comes to the Green Investment Fund, we take our responsibility very seriously. As we know, climate change is of course one of the most serious problems that our province and the world is facing right now. That’s why we implemented our cap-and-trade system. We’ve implemented the cap on pollution for businesses and we’ve allowed investments of \$1.9 billion this year in programs that help Ontario residents and businesses make affordable green choices.

Through the Ontario Green Investment Fund, we’re able to help businesses and consumers to save money and reduce their carbon footprint with things like electric vehicle infrastructure and retrofits for homes, social housing, schools, hospitals and colleges.

What I believe the member opposite is talking about is a minor accounting detail that was recommended to us by public officials.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Ted Arnott: The minister seems to be unaware of what is in the budget papers document. It’s on page 307 of the budget papers document. I would suggest he look at it

“Reasonably likely” is subjective. It will mean different things to different people. For a Liberal government on its last legs, it is a loophole so large that they will want and they will try to drive a diesel-powered truck through it. Again, this confirms what we’ve been saying all along: The Liberal government’s carbon tax program is a Liberal slush fund. We know that they will say anything to stay in power. But today, will the minister finally acknowledge the truth to this House: that their carbon tax policy is more about revenue generation than reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

1120

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Chris Ballard: To the Minister of Finance, please.

Hon. Charles Sousa: So, Mr. Speaker, let me reassure everyone in this House. This market approach to cap-and-trade has sourced over \$2 billion for the province of Ontario to invest, by law that we put in this House, into green energy to reduce emissions. The members opposite in this House are choosing not to do that. They’re choosing, actually, to do away with our leadership in this green business—

Interjections.

Hon. Charles Sousa: The Auditor General has recommended this very approach that we’ve implied in that document. So we are abiding by the accounting principles, but more importantly, we’re dedicating every

dollar to green investments to reduce our emissions, and that side of the House should be supporting that too.

STEEL INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Acting Premier. Desperate times call for desperate measures, and for the hundreds of workers who work at Hamilton Specialty Bar in my community, their families and hundreds of pensioners in my community, times are indeed desperate. Of course, you’d never know it, reading the Liberal budget. Not once does it refer to the steel industry. Hamilton Specialty Bar faces liquidation if something isn’t done to extend the negotiating window with a buyer who wants to keep making steel.

Hamilton city council passed a resolution last night to ask the Premier to take an active role, to step up to keep the mill viable until the sale goes through. Will she, Speaker?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the leader of the NDP for her question. I understand there are concerns that have been expressed regarding this very serious issue. I would say that on this side of the House we are disappointed, of course, to hear the news that is coming out of Hamilton Specialty Bar. We have, as a government, been monitoring the situation with respect to Hamilton Specialty Bar throughout the process of receivership. We will continue to work with them as they go through this process and ensure that they have all of the resources necessary. I would be happy to elaborate a little bit more in my follow-up answer to the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, it’s action that’s needed, not just monitoring. It’s not just well-paying steel jobs that are in danger here. It’s the pensions for hundreds more who gave their working lives to Hamilton Specialty Bar. But we’ve been here before, unfortunately. Still, there is no commitment from any level of Liberal government that pensioners go to the front of the line in the case of creditor liquidation.

If steel and the thousands of auto sector jobs that depend on a viable made-in-Ontario steel industry were important to this Premier and her government, why weren’t they in the budget?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the leader of the NDP for the follow-up question. I would say, as I said at the outset, that we will continue to monitor the situation and make sure that all the necessary steps are taken as the process unfolds, Speaker. But I would say that the broader context of the question deals with the steel industry and its health here in the province, and over the last number of weeks, as that particular industry, which employs, indirectly and directly, somewhere in the neighbourhood of 53,000 people across the province, including in Hamilton and the Soo and elsewhere—it obviously supports the thriving auto sector that we have here in this province.

This government and our Premier, as we face threats, for example, from south of the border—with the threat of having tariffs being applied by the American administration on steel—this government was the government, Speaker, that was fighting hard on this, that was relentlessly engaging with the Americans, that worked closely with our federal partners so that Canada was able to receive a qualified exemption. As a result of those steps and many others, we were able to celebrate the fact that for the time being, we have that qualified exemption.

In the meantime, this Premier, our finance minister and our government will stand up for our workers and our businesses, including in our domestic steel industry, and we'll continue to monitor the situation with Hamilton Specialty Bar. I appreciate the question from the leader of the NDP.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Han Dong: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Yesterday our Minister of Finance introduced Ontario's 2018 budget. Speaker, this budget includes an unprecedented \$79-billion commitment to transit over the next 14 years. This money will go to delivering critical transit projects right across the province. This budget clearly lays out our plan for care and opportunity.

When I speak to my constituents about what opportunity means to them, affordability is always top of mind. For many commuters in the city of Toronto, taking transit is a necessity, but it also comes with a cost. Members of my community are concerned about overcrowding on Toronto's transit system. They want to see real relief, and a huge part of that is providing affordable alternatives to Toronto's local transit network.

Would the minister please provide the members of this House with more information on how budget 2018 will help make transit in the city of Toronto more affordable?

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: I want to thank the member from Trinity–Spadina for his unwavering commitment to delivering real results for his community.

Our government knows that we need to keep making transit a more convenient option for commuters, and a critical part of that is making it more affordable.

That is why I'm so pleased that budget 2018 includes our government's commitment to reducing GO and UP Express fares for travel within the city of Toronto to just \$3 on a Presto card. This will take effect in early 2019 and put GO and UP Express fares in line with adult TTC fares, which will help make GO and UP Express a real choice for commuters travelling within the city of Toronto. Not only will this make our transit network more affordable; we know it will also help address capacity challenges on the TTC network.

So whether it's building new transit or leaving more money in the pockets of commuters, our government is absolutely committed to improving your commute. Whether you live in Etobicoke, Scarborough, Liberty

Village or the downtown core, this will make a real difference to transit commuters.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Han Dong: I want to thank the minister for the answer. I'm pleased to hear of our government's commitment to making our transit network more affordable. I know that fare integration is a top priority for our team at the Ministry of Transportation.

The existing approach to fares in our region is complex, and finding a solution requires a significant amount of planning and co-operation. Our government has taken a number of measures to reduce barriers and make commuting across this region simpler and more affordable.

Most recently, prior to budget 2018, we introduced a \$1.50 discount for transit riders transferring between GO Transit or the UP Express and the TTC. Metrolinx has found that GO Transit and UP Express transfers to TTC grew by 23% in both January and February 2018. Compared to the 2017 total, it's a significant increase. This discount is helping to save commuters, on average, \$720 per year.

Speaker, can the minister please provide more information to the members of this House on how budget 2018 will help make it easier to move between the different transit systems in our region?

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you to the member from Trinity–Spadina for his question.

In addition to \$3 flat fares for GO and UP Express trips within the city of Toronto, our government is also reducing the cost of taking GO for transit riders at a number of stations across the GTHA. We are also creating a \$3 flat fare for GO trips that are less than 10 kilometres. These changes will also come into effect in early 2019 and will make taking transit a much better option for commuters deciding between taking their car to work or hopping on GO.

We've also heard that a major challenge for commuters is having to pay two full fares when using both the TTC and their local transit service in the 905. That's why, as committed in budget 2018, we'll work with the TTC and a number of local transit agencies to introduce real discounts to transit users who transfer between the municipal transit networks and—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

GOVERNMENT FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Acting Premier. Premier Wynne once said, "I think everyone here knows that eliminating the deficit is the most important thing we can do to move to economic growth." Mr. Speaker, if that's the case, why is the Premier running six straight years of deficits?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we have balanced the budget. We've slain the deficit; we have a surplus of \$600 million.

Going forward, everyone in this House has a choice to make. Do we not continue to build and invest in the things that matter to the people of Ontario, given that our growth in our economy is more tempered than we had anticipated? Do we not continue to build in prudence and reserves and contingencies to ensure that we do not find ourselves in a position where we are not able to fend for those most in need?

1130

We have chosen to make those investments at less than 0.8% of our GDP so that we can continue to support them and grow our economy. That's exactly what we're doing. We're putting more money in people's pockets. We're helping our young families succeed. We're ensuring our seniors have better care. And we're going to continue to support child care, up to \$17,000 per child, so that they too can get a better start in life.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Back to the Acting Premier: The people inside and outside the House will have a choice of whether to trust a government that continues to break promises year after year.

Premier Wynne said, "I actually believe that fiscal prudence and a strong economy are connected. I think that they are absolutely connected, and that's why we have remained committed to our elimination of the deficit...."

"Fiscal prudence"? "Strong economy"? Not what comes to mind when people think about this Liberal government. In fact, they're going to drive our debt up to \$400 billion. Mr. Speaker, what happened to "fiscal prudence and a strong economy"?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we have built in fiscal prudence and we have a strong economy. The fact of the matter is, we outpace Canada and the G7 and the majority of the United States, and that's only because of the investments that we made to stimulate that growth, unlike the member opposite, who'd have us slash those investments, not make the investments in infrastructure like roads and bridges, schools and hospitals, or high-speed rail or broadband that we're now introducing in this budget to make our rural communities stronger. They're going to vote against those very measures.

We will continue to support our families—more supports for mental health and addiction, more supports for hospitals and more supports for seniors' care. All of these things matter and enable people to have a greater opportunity to share in the prosperity that this province now enjoys.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: To the Acting Premier: Recently, this Liberal government decided that auto workers should have fewer emergency leave days and scheduling protections than every other worker in Ontario. Yesterday we learned there is no auto strategy in budget 2018. There are workers in Windsor, Oshawa, Cambridge, Woodstock, Brampton, Peterborough, St. Catharines and across

the province who are left wondering why this Liberal government chose to neglect them yet again.

Auto workers deserve a comprehensive plan for the sector that will protect jobs and growth in our communities. They deserve a government that supports and respects them. Speaker, should we assume that the Liberals are simply adopting the old Conservative mentality to just let the auto sector die?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you very much for that question. I don't think there's any government in the history of the province of Ontario that has done more to ensure that we have a stable, secure auto sector in this province. The job creation ratio that goes along with that sector is one that is appreciated, Speaker, by all members on this side of the House. The investments we've made in that are proof positive, Speaker. We work along with Unifor. We work along with the parts plants.

I don't think there's any better evidence than that yesterday, when the budget was presented, one of the people who was most outspoken in praise of this budget was Jerry Dias, the president of the auto workers' union. If you want a clear indication, he was telling us this is a very socially progressive budget. Nobody understands auto like Unifor, Speaker.

I think we've done a tremendous job ensuring that Ontario has a stable economy. Auto is a huge part of that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: The minister can talk about respecting the auto sector, but I have received hundreds of emails, phone calls and petitions from auto workers across Ontario. They have told me that they have contacted the Premier, they've contacted the Minister of Labour, even Conservative members in their ridings, about the Liberal government's discriminatory regulation. They have been ignored—no response. Only New Democrats have been standing in solidarity with these workers.

On April 22, thousands of these auto workers are coming to Queen's Park. They are rallying to show this Liberal government just how fed up they are with being pushed aside. I'll be there and other New Democrats will be there. Speaker, will the Premier, the Minister of Labour or anyone in this Liberal government be here on April 22 to meet the auto workers and explain why they chose to discriminate against them?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: The Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to take a moment to echo what the Minister of Labour said in response to the first question about not only the ongoing and incredible support that our government has provided to Ontario's auto sector, but also what that success has meant for our economy.

For example, since 2004, our government has invested \$1.42 billion in auto, leveraging \$16.4 billion and creating or retaining more than 82,000 jobs.

We've also helped to attract investment since fall 2016, including investments at the Chrysler and Ford

facilities in Windsor, in Woodstock and in St. Catharines, and at Honda's facility in Alliston—not to mention the rest of the supply chain, which we know employs tens of thousands of other skilled Ontarians.

In 2017, for example, we know over 100,000 direct jobs in the auto manufacturing sector—vehicle assembly and parts. This is why we specifically made these investments.

I look forward to continuing to work closely with all—
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I remind the member: When I stand, you sit—and also that we're still in warnings.

New question.

SENIORS

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question is for the Minister of Seniors Affairs. As I'm sure you know, seniors make up the fastest-growing segment of Ontario's population. Today, there are more than two million seniors in our province, and that number is expected to double in the next 25 years. Seniors have spent a lifetime contributing to their communities and to the economy. They continue to do tremendous work, as is the case with seniors in my riding of Kingston and the Islands.

We need a government that is willing to make impactful investments in care so our seniors have the supports they need to live healthy, active, independent, safe and socially connected lives.

This government knows that seniors are wanting to remain in their homes for as long as they can, like my colleague from Barrie.

Last November, your ministry announced \$155 million in investments to support Aging with Confidence: Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors.

Mr. Speaker, would the Minister of Seniors Affairs explain to this House how the budget of 2018 continues to invest in care for Ontario seniors?

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I want to begin by thanking the member from Kingston and the Islands for this very important question and for giving me the opportunity to discuss how our government is choosing to continue to invest in care for our seniors.

In November of last year, we announced Aging with Confidence, a \$155-million plan for seniors. At that point, I made it very clear that that was just the beginning and that there was more to come. We've kept our promise, and I'm so proud that, yesterday, in our 2018 budget, we took another step in ensuring that seniors can continue to live in their own homes for as long as they can, as the member from Barrie so passionately talked about. The new Seniors' Healthy Home Program will provide up to \$750 annually to seniors aged 75 years or older for every eligible household—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Nice try. I go by the clock.

NOTICE OF REASONED AMENDMENT

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 71(b), the member for Nipissing has notified the Clerk of his intention to file notice of a reasoned amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill 31, An Act to implement budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes. The order for second reading of Bill 31 may therefore not be called today.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I recognize the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills on a point of order.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce guests of the Trillium Party of Ontario. We have two candidates: Lucy Guerrero, representing Humber River–Black Creek, and George Garvida, representing Scarborough–Guildwood.

We have supporters of theirs: Hilda Sembrano, Marco Garcia Ramirez, Rich Persad, Olumuyiwa Ajibolade, Gilda Trinidad, Silva Beatriz, Maria Pazmino, Roberid Arias, Susanna Giron, Editha Antolin, Rosaria Sanchez and Norma Lanuza. Welcome

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Sault Ste. Marie on a point of order.

Mr. Ross Romano: I am very honoured to invite today and welcome to the Legislature some special guests: Michigan State Senator Wayne Schmidt, in the rear of the gallery; his wife, Kathleen Shannon; and his two sons, Ryan and Danny. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have a sad announcement to make. I really don't like making this announcement, but I have to make this announcement. I have to inform you that this is the last day for our pages. We want to thank them for their hard work, and their wonderful work, in such a short period of time here at the Legislature

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finally, I wish all of you an opportunity to come together with your families during Easter and all of the other holy days that are celebrated during this month and this week, and that you have some time with your family. God bless you all.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1141 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, let me guess: the member from Beaches–East York?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. That was a fantastic guess.

I would like to welcome and recognize Sitharsana Srithas, who is in the members' gallery to the right here. I'll be talking more about her in my member's statement. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I rise today to acknowledge that recently the government decided to prorogue the House and in the process of doing so unfortunately swept off the order paper my bill, Bill 182, the Compassionate Care Act. Although I wish to acknowledge that this government has taken steps in the budget that was tabled to address some of the gaps in palliative care, there is more that needs to be done. In response to this, later this afternoon I plan on tabling my bill, the Compassionate Care Act, once again, in this Legislature.

The Compassionate Care Act is not really about death at all but rather about life—about living the good life and having a good death, right up to the very end. The Compassionate Care Act is an act providing the development of a provincial framework on hospice palliative care. At its very core, the Compassionate Care Act is about people. It's about helping people, honouring people, respecting people and loving people.

Palliative care focuses on the relief of pain and other symptoms for patients with advanced illnesses and on maximizing the quality of their remaining life. It may also involve emotional and spiritual support as well as caregiver and bereavement support, and provides comfort-based care as opposed to curative treatment.

The last time the Compassionate Care Act came up for a vote in this House, it received the unanimous support of the Legislature. I hope, in the future, to receive that once again. I look forward to seeing the bill tabled this afternoon and look forward to bringing it before the Legislature for a vote as soon as possible.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today to recognize the city of London as the first Ontario city to join the United Nations safe cities project. Led by Anova, a local agency that provides shelter and support for those who have experienced violence, the project is a five-year initiative to create a community where women feel safe from sexual violence and harassment in public spaces, including city streets, transportation and schools.

Last year, a survey conducted by Anova found that more than half of London transit riders had experienced some sort of sexual assault or harassment, especially on routes that served Western and Fanshawe students.

We know that urban planning and built environments have a huge impact on how women experience their

cities and neighbourhoods. Dark street corners, poorly lit pathways and infrequent bus service not only put women at risk, but also create barriers to their ability to participate in community activities. Avoidance and pepper spray are no solutions. Women deserve to live in cities that treat them equally, respond to their needs and reduce their risk of violence.

This week, London city council approved the implementation of a digital mapping system to pinpoint areas of the city where people feel unsafe. Once identified, community partners, including residents, local businesses and civic organizations, will work together to tackle the safety problems.

I congratulate the city of London and Anova for their efforts to make London a safer and more inclusive city.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Han Dong: I rise today to speak to an issue that is very important to me and to my constituents of Trinity-Spadina. Mental health will affect each and every one of us at some point in our lives. I am proud of this government's unprecedented response to this very important issue.

Soon after I was elected, I was at CAMH to officially open the Gerald Sheff and Shanitha Kachan Emergency Department, which improved and doubled the space available for 24/7 care for patients in crisis. In October 2014, I was there when this government pledged \$12 million to fund mental health supports on university and college campuses. In our 2017 budget, this government committed more than \$500 million over five years to expand and improve autism services and supports across Ontario.

And just last week, I was with the Premier and a few ministers at CAMH to announce a four-year investment of \$2.1 billion in mental health care. This is the single largest investment of its kind in Canadian history.

We are revamping the way we address mental health in this province. Mr. Speaker. We are improving access to services, staffing schools with mental health workers and creating youth wellness hubs, and creating more support in housing units.

We have a plan, and it's time to act now.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Gila Martow: This weekend, we're going to be celebrating Easter with the Christian community, Pass-over with the Jewish community, and we just celebrated Nowruz with the Persian community. They're all welcoming spring with the hope for peace and prosperity in their communities.

I just want to mention that, unfortunately, while we're celebrating, we also have to remember that there's still too much hate in many of our communities. Chabad Flamingo, a synagogue in my neighbourhood, had a rock thrown through its glass doors just last week.

More needs to be done, Mr. Speaker. So I am calling on all those in my community to work with representa-

tives such as CIJA, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, on their initiative. They just sent over 200 letters to my inbox—and I'm sure many here received some letters as well—calling on the government to do more to help vulnerable communities, not just religious communities but LGBT communities as well, to help in giving them support in the face of hate. It's not enough to commemorate. We have to ensure that we're doing all we can to make our communities as safe and strong as they can be.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. John Vanthof: It has recently come to my attention that the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services is considering changing regulations for firemen—that all firemen in the province have to be certified—and this could conceivably cause some problems for volunteer fire departments throughout the province, particularly in northern Ontario.

This isn't a case about training. All firefighters across the province are trained, but if you look at a case of volunteer fire departments—people who have full-time jobs off the fire department, who do their training on weekends and evenings—a lot of these people are just not going to continue being volunteer firefighters if they have to leave their jobs to become certified. The minister has said that one of the solutions would be grandfathering the people who are already volunteer firefighters, but in the long term that doesn't solve the problem either because they won't be able to recruit new ones.

We have to take a longer look at this because if we lose volunteer fire departments in communities across the province, we will lose total service. Elk Lake is a good example. Reeve Terry Fiset explained to me they have no OPP, they have no ambulance service and they have no first responders other than the volunteer fire department.

These people need an option other than having to take time off their jobs to get certified. We need to look at this before this regulation is changed, Speaker.

GOVERNMENT FEES

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: This afternoon, I will be debating my private member's bill, Bill 26, the fee waivers act. In the past two days alone, our office has received dozens of letters and an outpouring of support from law students, legal professionals, legal clinics, numerous other diverse service providers and concerned community members from across Ontario and Canada.

Studies show that low-income members of the community are disproportionately susceptible to losing their government-issued ID or having it stolen. Among many other diverse cases, evidence indicates that perpetrators of domestic violence will withhold their victims' wallet and identification as a tactic to lure them back into the home or, worse still, keep them from leaving. Many choose to leave their IDs and, consequently, their lives behind.

Mr. Speaker, different types of ID cards can be as much as \$35, and while this is a nominal cost to most Canadians, it can pose an insurmountable obstacle to the most vulnerable in our communities. By waiving these costs for those who cannot afford it, Bill 26 tackles the problem directly. It will also help organizations who have been relying on parts of their own budgets or external donations to financially support clients who require identification on a case-by-case basis.

I hope that everyone in this House will support this bill, thereby increasing access to justice and building a more fair and just society for all.

1310

ELMIRA MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL

Mr. Michael Harris: I want to extend an invitation to all of you and all of you at home to the 54th edition of the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival. We all know that when it comes to pancake parties, the world's finest flapjack jubilee spills out only once every year in Elmira, as young and old pay tribute to the time-honoured traditions of our sugar bush roots.

While we are proud of all the pure pancake-topping perfection being pulled out by the bucket as we tap the sap throughout our region, every year there can only be one to win the award as the very best of the best.

Speaker, after two years at the top, this year Maple Tap Farm is handing its candy-coated crown to Riverside Maple Products, which, as tradition dictates, will be the exclusive provider of syrup at this year's Elmira Maple Syrup Festival on April 7.

The trees, of course, have been tapped, and I am looking forward to joining the organizers and more than 2,000 volunteers across the region to serve the best pancakes in Waterloo region.

With the best syrup award already handed out, the only question left will be who takes home the honours in the annual pancake-flipping contest. Not to sugar-coat things here, I want to provide fair warning to all comers that this year, while Joey Bats may not be on the plate on opening day, my teammates on the Batter Flippers are back to claim our prize: victory and syrupy-sweet bragging rights in the annual pancake-flipping contest.

From Flapjack himself to farm festivities, live music, pony rides and the mobile sugar shack, there's something for everyone. So bring your sweet tooth on down to Waterloo region and celebrate sweet victory for the Batter Flippers and join in the fun of the 54th annual Elmira Maple Syrup Festival. We'll see you April 7.

SITHARSANA SRITHAS

Mr. Arthur Potts: I would like to recognize today Sitharsana Srithas for receiving a Leading Women, Leading Girls award. This award celebrates women who demonstrate exceptional leadership in breaking down barriers and encouraging women to get involved in careers where they are under-represented. Sitharsana has

been an active member in our community of Beaches–East York, and I commend her for her efforts.

I want to provide a brief overview of her various accomplishments and contributions to her community. She received her bachelor of science degree from the University of Toronto, Scarborough. And there, as president of the Scarborough Campus Student Union, she represented about 14,000—and continues to—full-time and part-time undergraduate students.

Under her leadership, Sitharsana has successfully championed several initiatives, which include establishing a food centre that aims to alleviate food insecurity on campus; the implementation of free feminine hygiene products in all the female and gender-inclusive washrooms on campus; and she has advocated for creating safer spaces through a gender-inclusive washroom campaign in collaboration with SC:OUT, the LGBTQ+ student organization.

But we are not done yet. She has organized student consultations pertaining to the University of Toronto sexual violence policy and contributed to the implementation and opening of the sexual violence prevention centre. She is also an at-large member of the Scarborough Community Renewal Organization, where she brings forth student perspectives regarding issues including transit, housing and inclusivity.

She has actively promoted equality and diversity and, importantly, has been a positive example to women and girls in her community.

Speaker, I would again like to congratulate Sitharsana and to commend her for all the great work she's done in the community. Thank you for being here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Congratulations.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise today to again express my support for the two hospital sites in Huntsville and Bracebridge. This has been a big issue in Muskoka for a number of years, especially since 2015, when the board of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare proposed the idea of a single hospital site.

This week, Huntsville town council was considering a motion to ask the province to dismiss the board and CEO of MAHC. I am pleased the council agreed to put that aside for a month while they meet with the board. I want to thank the board of MAHC for offering to meet with council to answer their questions.

This motion was an unusual step, but Mayor Aitchison and the council are doing their best to represent the views of the community. Unfortunately, concern that the MAHC board has already decided on a single site and is just going through the motions of listening to the public has the mayors of Huntsville and Bracebridge and the communities frustrated.

To address these concerns, I encourage the board of MAHC to be completely open with council and release as much information as possible to the public.

I don't want to put all the blame on Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare. MAHC is dealing with significant funding challenges. For some reason, MAHC did not receive its fair share of recent increases in hospital funding. While the government announced a 4.6% increase across Ontario, MAHC only received a 1.4% increase, not enough to keep up with salary increases required by collective agreements signed by the province or increased energy costs.

I call upon the province to increase funding to MAHC in order to ensure the two fully operational hospital sites can be maintained.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PETER KORMOS MEMORIAL ACT (TRILLIUM GIFT OF LIFE NETWORK AMENDMENT), 2018

LOI DE 2018 COMMÉMORANT PETER KORMOS (MODIFICATION DE LA LOI SUR LE RÉSEAU TRILLIUM POUR LE DON DE VIE)

Madame Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 32, An Act to amend the Trillium Gift of Life Network Act / Projet de loi 32, Loi visant à modifier la Loi sur le Réseau Trillium pour le don de vie.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The Peter Kormos Memorial Act (Trillium Gift of Life Network Amendment): Currently, the Trillium Gift of Life Network requires that consent be obtained before tissue can be removed from a human body. Under the proposed amendments, consent is no longer required, but a person may object to the removal of the tissue prior to his or her death or a substitute may object on his or her behalf after the death has occurred. If an objection is made, no tissue shall be removed from the body. Part II of the act sets out the manner and circumstances in which an objection may be made by or on behalf of the person.

Peter Kormos passed away five years ago, and this is something that was very important to him.

COMPASSIONATE CARE ACT, 2018

LOI DE 2018 SUR LES SOINS DE COMPASSION

Mr. Oosterhoff moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 33, An Act providing for the development of a provincial framework on hospice palliative care / Projet de loi 33, Loi prévoyant l'élaboration d'un cadre provincial des soins palliatifs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: The bill enacts the Compassionate Care Act, 2018. The act requires the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to develop a provincial framework designed to support improved access to hospice palliative care. The minister must table a report setting out the provincial framework in the Legislative Assembly within one year after the bill comes into force. Within five years after the report is tabled, the minister must prepare and table a report on the state of hospice palliative care in Ontario. Each report must be published on the government of Ontario website.

LABOUR RELATIONS AMENDMENT ACT (REPLACEMENT WORKERS), 2018

LOI DE 2018 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL (TRAVAILLEURS SUPPLÉANTS)

Madame Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 34, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 / Projet de loi 34, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The Labour Relations Amendment Act (Replacement Workers), 2018: The purpose of the bill is to restore the provisions that were incorporated into the Labour Relations Act by the Labour Relations and Employment Statute Law Amendment Act of 1992, and subsequently repealed by the Labour Relations Act of 1995. The purpose of the provisions being restored is to prevent an employer from replacing striking or locked-out employees with replacement workers. The bill allows replacement workers to be used in emergencies.

This is an anti-scab bill in honour of Peter Kormos.

REMOVING BARRIERS IN AUDIOLOGY AND SPEECH- LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY ACT, 2018 LOI DE 2018 VISANT À SUPPRIMER LES OBSTACLES EN AUDIOLOGIE ET EN ORTHOPHONIE

Mr. Oosterhoff moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 35, An Act to amend the Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 35, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les audiologistes et les orthophonistes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

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Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: This bill amends the Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Act, 1991, in order to modify the scope of practice of audiology and speech-language pathology. The bill also expands the acts that may be performed by a member of the College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists in the course of engaging in the practice of audiology or speech-language pathology.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: "Whereas Orkambi was approved by Health Canada for use in cystic fibrosis (CF) patients with two copies of the F508del-CFTR mutation, aged 12 years and older;

"Whereas Orkambi is the first drug to treat the basic defect in the largest population of Canadians with cystic fibrosis. It can slow disease progression, allowing patients to live longer, healthier lives;

"Whereas CF specialists have established clinical criteria for Orkambi, including start and stop criteria; these specialists are best suited to manage access to medications in the treatment of CF patients;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to negotiate a fair price for Orkambi and to make it available through Ontario public drug programs for those who meet the conditions set by Health Canada and the clinical criteria established by Canadian CF clinicians."

I agree with this petition. I affix my name to it and send it with page Ryan.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Noah Irvine, a young man who gathered more than 600 names on the following petition. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions delivered its action plan seven years ago and less than three of the select committee's 23 recommendations have been acted upon;

"Whereas the committee's primary recommendation is the creation of Mental Health and Addictions Ontario, an organization responsible for overseeing all mental health and addiction services in Ontario;

"Whereas the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions Act would consolidate all mental health and addictions programs and services in Ontario under a stand-alone ministry of mental health and addictions;

"Whereas the bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on September 14 and still has not received consideration;"

They "petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To immediately take action to create a stand-alone ministry of mental health and addictions by studying the bill in committee at the earliest possible date and by supporting it in third reading."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Tamsyn to bring it to the Clerk.

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has faced serious criticism by OPSEU, offender advocacy groups, media, the general public, the Ombudsman, the Ontario Human Rights Commission, the MCSCS independent auditor ... and the Auditor General as a result of significant deficiencies in the correctional system; and

"Whereas the rates of assaults on correctional workers continue to increase exponentially; and

"Whereas Ontario probation and parole officers have the highest workloads in the nation; and

"Whereas Ontario has one of the highest recidivism rates in Canada; and

"Whereas the current working conditions of correctional staff, coupled with the comparatively low rates of investment across Canada has resulted in difficulties with staff retention and recruitment;

"We, the undersigned correctional workers, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario government significantly increase expenditures to resolve the crisis in corrections by hiring full-time correctional workers, increasing funding for adequate offender services and increasing investments to recruit and retain skilled professionals and reduce recidivism."

I wholeheartedly agree, sign my signature and give it to page Annabelle for the table.

ACCIDENT BENEFITS

M^{me} France G  linas: I would like the recognize Qusai Gulamhusein for collecting these petitions. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario Regulation 347/13 has made four changes to the Statutory Accident Benefits Schedule (SABS), also known as Ontario Regulation 34/10 effective Feb 1, 2014. These regulations have consider-

ably reduced the dollar amounts allocated for patients receiving assessments and treatment following a motor vehicle accident;

"Whereas the \$3,500 minor injury guideline cap is an insufficient amount of funds provided, since assessments on all patients are required to ensure their safe ability in performing tasks associated with attendant care, house-keeping and caregiving. Furthermore repetitive muscular strain as a result of performing household tasks daily can lead to chronic long-term impairment. Accidental slips/falls due to dizziness/vertigo can result in further injuries involving fractures;

"Whereas this petition is to validate that the \$3,500 minor injury guideline monetary fund is an insufficient amount to enable auto accident patients with soft tissue injury ... to reach optimal recovery to their pre-accident status. Removing sections 18(1) and 18(2) from the Ontario Statutory Accident Benefits Schedule will enable the right efforts for accident victims with soft tissue injury to receive the adequate assessment and treatment required. In addition it will minimize the patient's risks for further injury ... that are associated with performing attendant care, housekeeping/home maintenance, caregiving and functional tasks";

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To remove the minor injury guideline, sections 18(1) and 18(2) of the Ontario Statutory Accident Benefits Schedule and incorporate rebuttal examination reports back into the system."

I will sign it and give it to Ryan to bring to the Clerk.

ANTI-SMOKING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I have a petition here from folks who are concerned with tobacco use.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas:

"—In the past 10 years in Ontario, 86% of all movies with on-screen smoking were rated for youth;

"—The tobacco industry has a long, well-documented history of promoting tobacco use on-screen;

"—A scientific report released by the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit estimated that 185,000 children in Ontario today will be recruited to smoking by exposure to on-screen smoking;

"—More than 59,000 will eventually die from tobacco-related cancers, strokes, heart disease and emphysema, incurring at least \$1.1 billion in health care costs; and whereas an adult rating (18A) for movies that promote on-screen tobacco in Ontario would save at least 30,000 lives and half a billion health care dollars;

"—The Ontario government has a stated goal to achieve the lowest smoking rates in Canada;

"—79% of Ontarians support not allowing smoking in movies rated G, PG, 14A... ;

“—The Minister of Government and Consumer Services has the authority to amend the regulations of the Film Classification Act via cabinet;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“—To request the Standing Committee on Government Agencies examine the ways in which the regulations of the Film Classification Act could be amended to reduce smoking in youth-rated films released in Ontario;

“—That the committee report back on its findings to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and that the Minister of Government and Consumer Services prepare a response.”

I have already affixed my signature and will send it up with Lauren.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas since 2006, the Auditor General of Ontario had been responsible for reviewing all government advertising to ensure it was not partisan; and

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“Whereas in 2015, the government watered down the legislation, removing the ability of the Auditor General to reject partisan ads and essentially making the Auditor General a rubber stamp; and

“Whereas the government has since spent millions to run ads such as those for the Ontario pension plan that were extremely partisan in nature; and

“Whereas the government is currently using hundreds of thousands of taxpayers’ dollars to run partisan ads; and

“Whereas the government did not feel the need to advertise to inform the people of Ontario of any of the many hydro rate increases; and

“Whereas history shows that the most recent governments have increased ad spending in the year preceding a general election;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To immediately reinstate the Auditor General’s authority to review all government advertising for partisan messages before the ads run.”

I agree with this and will pass it off to Tamsyn.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mrs. Janet Natale for sending me those petitions. They read as follows:

“Whereas quality care for the 78,000 residents of (LTC) homes is a priority for many Ontario families; and

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents’ increasing acuity and the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

“Whereas several Ontario coroner’s inquests into LTC homes deaths have recommended an increase in direct hands-on care for residents and staffing levels and the most reputable studies on this topic recommend 4.1 hours of direct care per day”;

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Amend the LTC Homes Act ... for a legislated minimum care standard of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Adam to bring it to the Clerk.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. James J. Bradley: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas an undisclosed number of Canadian consumers’ personal information was hacked in the recent Equifax breach; and

“Whereas impacted person(s)’ credit ratings are affected by breaches of this nature, which has repercussions for impacted person(s)’ day-to-day living; and

“Whereas breached data of this nature includes names, addresses and social insurance numbers; and

“Whereas the number of impacted person(s) cannot be confirmed; and

“Whereas there is no mandatory requirement for private sector entities in Ontario or other Canadian provinces to report a potential and/or actual privacy breach; and

“Whereas government must prevent future security breaches and access to critical consumer information; and

“Whereas government must enhance consumer protection in Ontario, which effectively builds consumer confidence;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the province of Ontario enact Bill 167, An Act to amend the Consumer Reporting Act, to mandate that consumer reporting agencies respond to consumer inquiry no later than two business days after receiving the inquiry; provide a copy of the person’s consumer report free of charge; and that a consumer may request that a consumer reporting agency place a notice of security free on the consumer’s file.”

I affix my name to this petition, as I’m in complete agreement.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

“Whereas electricity rates have risen by more than 300% since the current Liberal government took office;

“Whereas over half of Ontarians’ power bills are regulatory and delivery charges and the global adjustment;

“Whereas the global adjustment is a tangible measure of how much Ontario must overpay for unneeded wind

and solar power, and the cost of offloading excess power to our neighbours at a loss;

“Whereas the market rate for electricity, according to IESO data, has been less than three cents per kilowatt hour to date in 2016, yet the Liberal government’s lack of responsible science-based planning has not allowed these reductions to be passed on to Ontarians, resulting in electrical bills several times more than that amount;

“Whereas the implementation of cap-and-trade will drive the cost of electricity even higher and deny Ontarians the option to choose affordable natural gas heating;

“Whereas more and more Ontarians are being forced to cut down on essential expenses such as food and medicines in order to pay their increasingly unaffordable electricity bills;

“Whereas the ill-conceived energy policies of this Liberal government that ignored the advice of independent experts and government agencies, such as the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) and the independent electrical system operator (IESO), and are not based on science have resulted in Ontarians’ electricity costs rising, despite lower natural gas costs and increased energy conservation in the province;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity paid for by Ontarians, including costs associated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians’ energy bills.”

I fully support this petition, Madam Speaker, and will affix my signature and give it to page Jathusa.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank my constituent Mrs. Anne Gascon, from Capreol, for this petition. It reads as follows:

“Whereas there continues to be a shortage of long-term-care beds in Ontario, resulting in the inappropriate use of acute care beds in Ontario’s hospitals; and

“Residents who do need secure long-term care are often forced to move away from their communities, families and friends”;

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To lift the moratorium on long-term-care licences so that the inventory of long-term-care spaces can be brought to a level that will ease the burden placed on Ontario’s hospitals; and

“Ensure that licences are granted for the creation of long-term-care spaces not only in cities but in smaller communities where residents are being forced to abandon everything they’ve ever known.”

I fully support this petition and will affix my name to it and ask my good page, Tatyana, to bring it to the Clerk.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The time allocated for petitions has expired.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

TAXATION

Mr. Toby Barrett: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Ontario government should reduce taxes where feasible, and not introduce any new provincial taxes or raise existing provincial taxes—including, but not limited to, any personal income taxes, business taxes, corporate taxes, or carbon taxes.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Barrett has moved private member’s notice of motion number 28. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker. As we can see in this private member’s motion, I feel I am extending an olive branch to not only the governing party but the third party, to ask for their support to, at minimum, hold the line on tax increases. The last thing our economy and its hard-working participants need right now is tax hikes. However, I am also asking members opposite to vote for tax reductions, where feasible. That’s something I certainly favour and have always voted for during my tenure here in the Legislature.

I do pose the question: When was the last time an Ontario budget cut taxes? Look at yesterday’s budget. It jacks up taxes \$2 billion over the next three years. Unfortunately, almost all of us know a thing or two about budgets that raise taxes. Again, look at yesterday’s budget.

Under past Liberal and NDP administrations, we have almost come to expect taxes will be raised in each budget. I can harken back to my first budget as a government MPP. That was the May 1996 budget. It was no ordinary budget at the time. It was a budget that cut taxes, just as we promised during the 1995 election campaign.

Again, when was the last time an Ontario budget cut taxes? Hard-pressed, hard-working, skeptical, I’ll-believe-it-when-I-see-it Ontario taxpayers have rarely heard those two little words used in a budget: tax cut.

High taxes kill jobs. They undermine government revenue and slow economic growth. If high taxes created jobs, there would probably be close to zero unemployment in Ontario right now. If high taxes were good for revenues, we would have a budget surplus and no accumulated debt. If high taxes helped economic growth, we’d be living through a bonanza right now.

I’ll go back to that tax-and-spend decade from 1985 to 1995: It did not work. Again, the tax-and-spend decade and a half, from 2003 to 2018, clearly hasn’t worked either.

We can learn from the past. The two governments in this province from 1985 to 1995 hiked taxes no fewer than 65 times, including 11 personal income tax hikes. At that time, consumers were given 65 reasons not to spend money. Businesses were given 65 reasons not to hire new employees. Investors were given 65 reasons to keep their

money out of our Ontario economy. We saw 65 reasons why our economy was moving so slowly to recover from the recession back in the early 1990s.

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Speaker, there is a bit of a case study that would serve as an evaluation. Bob Rae alone increased total tax rates the equivalent of some \$4 billion. And what did we get? At that time, we will recall, we had nearly 9% unemployment, successive double-digit deficits, an accumulated debt of \$100 billion, and Ontario at that time had the highest per capita residents in the country trapped in the cycle of welfare dependency.

So despite those huge tax rate hikes, the government really didn't increase the money that came in. The reason was simple. For most Ontario families, then as now, after you have paid the bills, after you have paid the rent or the mortgage, after you've bought your groceries, there's really not very much money left. Rather than money left at the end of the month, you're left with month left at the end of the money.

My point is, Ontario families are the critical link in our economic recovery. Small businesses, retailers, store owners live and die by their customers and their customers' ability to buy. These entrepreneurs are the backbone of our economy. Small business owners create the vast majority of new jobs in our province. Again, that holds now as it did then.

The problem was, and is today, not enough people are buying. The idea of disposable income seems to have been disposed of, essentially, because governments historically take more and more of their own money. They never see it again. So forget about that new fridge, that new stove, home repairs, a new car, perhaps a special restaurant meal. Forget about paying down your credit cards. Many families, during that decade—and we see it now—just couldn't afford to make these extra expenditures.

I would also add that Ontario residents today are not only living under the burden of high taxes, but also high electricity rates. We just heard a petition to that effect. On top of that, it seems that just about every provincial fee and stipend and revenue tool under the sun has been increased over the past decade and a half.

So it makes sense, in my view, to say that it is time—as we said it was time back then, in 1995, under Mike Harris—that government leaves more of our own money in our own hands, to get people spending again, to boost the consumer economy, to kick-start the recovery, and, quite simply, to create jobs.

If I can quote Doug Ford, "Relief is on the way."

It's this kind of plan that the previous Progressive Conservative government was following. The first step in our cut to the provincial income tax rate came in May 1996. Unlike the past Liberal and NDP governments that made it a priority to raise the revenue of the Ontario government during that lost decade, as I said, from 1985 to 1995, our goal at that time was to raise the average income of the Ontario family, not necessarily to raise the average income of the Ontario government.

There was an expression back then, and it holds true today: At that time, we did not have a revenue problem; we had a spending problem.

At that time, our common sense government said it would cut taxes to create jobs, and it did.

Mr. James J. Bradley: For the rich.

Mr. Toby Barrett: The government returned roughly \$4 billion over three years to taxpayers' pockets. That means we took the total tax rate burden back to where it was before Bob Rae.

Some who opposed lower taxes—and I may have heard a comment just recently—said the government's plan was a giveaway to the rich or to "Tory friends." Let me be clear that those friends—and I can refer back to 1995—elected a government to keep a tax-cut promise. They were then, as they are today, white-collar, blue-collar, middle-income, lower-income. They are behind desks; they are behind the wheels of trucks and tractors and combines. They are farmers and farm workers. Their roots go back many, many generations, and they've also just arrived to start a new and better life in a better place. These are the hard-working people that tax relief will help.

Some say a tax cut disproportionately benefits the rich; I just heard that probably 45 seconds ago. It's not true. Tax cuts benefit a broad spectrum of working people and middle-class people, because that is where the bulk of the tax revenue comes from.

We knew that back in 1995. Back then, 87% of taxpayers in Ontario earned less than \$50,000; these are 1995 income figures. The payoff of our tax cut was a renewed economy; job creation—that was clearly there; hope. It's hard to measure hope. We saw hope. We saw prosperity for middle-income working families.

Speaker, I hear complaints. For example, one complaint we hear is, what if taxpayers just save the money or invest the money? But again, any support for enterprise to expand or buy new equipment or open a new plant and hire new people is an investment we should be celebrating, not criticizing.

In 1995, we were asked, could we afford to cut taxes? I heard that this afternoon as well. After those 10 years of tax hikes and rising spending that killed our economy, we essentially knew we couldn't afford to not do this. Ontario, at the time, had the second-highest taxes in North America. At that time, all around the world, jurisdictions were cutting taxes. More than 50 countries had reduced taxes for businesses or individuals. In North America, jurisdictions such as Arizona, Alberta, New Jersey, New Brunswick and Michigan had all followed suit.

Today, we have another distinction in Ontario. As we know, we are the most indebted province or state, the most indebted subnational jurisdiction, in the world. Again, how can this happen despite a decade and a half of tax increases?

In the early 1990s, Michigan, for example, then as now—I would imagine Michigan may well be our largest export market because of auto. The state of Michigan

lowered taxes 21 times in four years, and as a result enjoyed their lowest unemployment level in 25 years. They moved it down to 4.8%.

Each of these places is offering its citizens a better environment for living, obviously, for investing and earning a paycheque. That's why today, as before, and through this motion, the government of Ontario must hold the line, at minimum, and, where appropriate, cut provincial income taxes. It's good for the taxpayer. It's good for job creation and the economy. It's good for our competitiveness, certainly given changes in the US administration south of the border. Most importantly, it's good for Ontario.

Speaker, Premier Harris tabled that budget on May 7, 1996, through his finance minister, Ernie Eves. It was truly a turnaround budget and the first budget in decades to roll back—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The Conservatives show us, yet again, that they're all about bumper sticker slogans. They're not about anything that's really serious.

Do you know what really galls me with what has just been said? I was here in 1995. I remember really well when Mike Harris used to preach, and I agreed with him, "There is only one taxpayer." If you pay taxes to the federal government, the provincial government or the municipal government, it's one taxpayer.

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What did Harris do? He said, "I'm going to lower taxes by downloading everything to municipalities." As a result, you guys downloaded roads, you downloaded ambulances, you downloaded housing, all of which has impacted municipalities, and our property taxes at the municipal level went through the roof. And you have the gall to say that you're not going to raise taxes? All you did was download the problem to our municipal partners.

If you talk to any mayor, any council in this province, they will remember Mike Harris. He's the guy who raised—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Order.

I return to the member from Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The Conservatives raised taxes, in the time that Mike Harris and Ernie Eves were in this province, to the highest degree we ever saw. I saw my taxes in the city of Timmins move from what was under \$2,000 a year to over \$6,000 a year today as a result of your downloading. And you're going to say that you are clever and you're smart, and you're going to promise everybody in Ontario that Tories are going to save us money? All you're doing is transferring the problem.

I'll tell you what you do. You cut taxes again, you go back and do what you talk about—deficits. You're going to say, "We're smart. Hey, city of Timmins, hey, city of St. Catharines"—or any other one—"here are more provincial services that we're going to throw on to your backs." The taxpayer has had it; they can't pay any more,

because you guys were the ones who set this up in the first place.

So don't come into this House, don't come into this election cycle, or don't go into anything trying to preach the virtues of Conservatives when it comes to cutting taxes. Because the only thing the Tories know is not cutting taxes; it's about how you download the cut taxes to somebody else so that somebody else can pay. And I say to you guys: shame.

The other thing that we need to take into consequence in all of this is that people do want to have access to their services. I haven't seen one Conservative member in the time that I've been here, since 1990, who has gone across the way and said, "Do you know what? I've got too many hospital services in my community. I've got too many" whatever type of service "in my community." They understand, as I do and as Liberals do, and they understand as good members, that it takes public dollars to run strong public services. If you're running a hospital, the money doesn't come out of thin air.

Doug Ford can talk all he wants about turning over every stone and finding efficiencies. Let me tell you what the efficiencies are. What do you think the bulk of any budget within the provincial government is all about? If you're in the education system, I would argue, 85% of it is salaries. If you're in the health care system, 75%, 80% is salaries. So when you talk about efficiencies, why don't you talk about what you're really talking about? This is about people, and this is about cutting services. This is about saying that when you need a nurse at 12 o'clock at night when you go in with your sick daughter or son, there may not be a nurse, there may not be a doctor, there may not be an orderly, there may not be a cleaner, there may not be kitchen staff, because that's what you have to do to find those efficiencies.

The Conservatives have this bumper sticker idea that all they have to do is use these simple Trump-type statements or simple Mike Harris-type statements and everybody's going to say, "How wonderful." I warn people, these Tories—we've been down this road before. We saw what they did. They came in in 1995 and they talked a good game, and they said, "We're going to cut your taxes. Look at the taxes we're going to cut."

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm not going to argue that you didn't cut taxes; you did. But what you did is, you transferred the whole burden of who pays the tax onto the municipalities. That was horrible, and it affected every ratepayer who pays any taxes in this province, in any municipality.

I urge members, as they get up and debate today, to think about what your neighbours paid in property tax post-1995 to what they paid after these guys left office.

Municipal councils have been struggling, just on downloading highways alone. You downloaded in the city of Timmins and you downloaded in Iroquois Falls highways that were provincial roads. They were provincial highways, for God's sake. You took roads that were provincial links between city A and city B and you

downloaded them onto municipalities. Municipalities don't have the money to do the infrastructure. Just to fix a section of Highway 101, which is Algonquin in the city of Timmins, the cost is over \$100 million. Where is a municipality going to find \$100 million to fix that road? We're lucky if we get the max, which is \$3 million a year, in Connecting Links funding. Thank you, Mike Harris, for downloading \$996 million onto the city taxpayers in the city of Timmins.

You downloaded ambulance and you downloaded housing. Do you know what that means to the city of Timmins in a one-year process? It means \$12 million a year. That's 10% of our budget, and we're having to pay it in higher municipal taxes.

And then you guys got to government and you said, "We're going to change the assessment system so large industrial users don't have to pay as much tax." So the larger industrial users, like Abitibi, like Kidd Creek, like Goldcorp, like all of these companies that were out there, went out and appealed their taxes. They won those appeals based on the legislation that Mike Harris put in place in order to help his friends, and as a result, the assessments went down. Do you know how much that was for Kapuskasing? It was \$2 million for a town of 16,000 people. You stand in this House and talk about cutting taxes? All you've done is kick the people of Kapuskasing in the teeth when it comes to what you've done.

I've had it with this stupid Tory ideology. People have got to call it for what it is. You guys are about raising taxes on the backs of municipal taxpayers, and we've had it.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Order. I need the member to withdraw his earlier comments.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. James J. Bradley: Well, this is very interesting, because I have been through the history, as the member for Timmins—James Bay has, of the downloading that took place on municipalities. That has been reversed now. An agreement was made by this government with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to upload over \$2 billion worth of costs back up to the provincial level where it belonged. It's easy to be able to balance the budget if you just shove the costs onto somebody else, as was the plan before and will be the plan again, to achieve what they want to achieve.

I heard mention of user fees. I can recall the Harris government—it must have been, what, 987 user fees that they increased when they were in power, one after another, hurting the most vulnerable people in our society.

They ran deficits until 1999, and then in 1999 they sold Highway 407. Not only did they sell it, but they signed a contract that allowed the owners of the 407 to put the prices up at any time. It was a fire sale, a bargain basement sale, of some \$3 billion for something worth

then at least \$10 billion, but they wanted to show a balanced budget.

Now, if you want to say "cuts," they cut the disability payments. The most vulnerable people in our society were cut by 21%. That, to me, is what I picture when I picture the Doug Ford Conservatives: seeing the boots put to the most vulnerable people in our society. That's what happened both to the people on Ontario Works, as it would be called today, and the people on disability.

Hospitals: They had the hospital closing commission, as I called it. They went to my friend from Niagara West—Glanbrook—they went to the hospital there. That was on the list. It left the list because Debbie Zimmerman put up a big fight, brought the people of Grimsby and surrounding area together, and forced them to take it off the hit list, along with Tim Hudak, who was involved in that at that time as well. We saw some 28 hospitals close. Did that save a lot of money? It sure did. But it was not good for the province of Ontario.

Now, I wanted to mention the People's Guarantee, because at least the People's Guarantee started to moderate some of those policies. But apparently that's being booted out the back door. Now that the former leader, the former member for the area around Barrie, Mr. Brown, has left, we are now going to throw out any of the moderate pieces of that particular program, the People's Guarantee.

What we have proposed here is the Trump formula. It's exactly what Donald Trump wants. If you're rich, if you're privileged and if you're powerful, you love this kind of stuff. If you're anybody else, you don't.

1400

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm certainly pleased to speak to the motion brought forward by the member from Haldimand—Norfolk. The motion calls on the government to reduce taxes where feasible—where feasible—and not to bring in new provincial taxes or raise existing taxes. It's a very sensible motion. My colleagues on the other side should take it to heart.

We all had to suffer through the introduction of the government's fiscal plan yesterday. By some miracle, they found a way to both run a massive deficit and increase personal and business taxes. Only this government could pull off such a feat.

Yesterday, 1.8 million hard-working Ontarians found out their taxes are going up. Yesterday, 20,000 businesses also learned that their taxes will increase right after the election. More than half a billion dollars in new taxes this year alone, and growing every year, will be wasted on political self-interest.

My riding of Perth—Wellington has many agricultural businesses that are already struggling. They've been hit with skyrocketing hydro prices and a damaging carbon tax, plus enormous red tape. Now, thanks to this government's re-election spending scheme, they will be burned with even more tax hikes.

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It's interesting how the member from Barrie, from her past statements, doesn't believe in small business, but I and our party do.

"They're spending more, running bigger deficits, increasing our taxes, and have no plan to balance the budget if re-elected. Meanwhile," the finance minister "is bragging about beating fiscal targets. It's really quite disturbing." I could not agree more.

There's a quote from Rocco Rossi, president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce: "The Ontario budget not only fails to provide the offsets our members need, it will leave some businesses, including small businesses, paying more in taxes."

I'll close with this: If the Liberals are willing to raise taxes just before an election, just imagine what they will do if they stay in power. They can't be trusted. It's time for change.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I really, thoroughly, enjoyed the member's comments from Timiskaming—Cochrane—excuse me, from Timmins—James Bay. And I always enjoy the comments from the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane.

The Tories—same old story, same old Tory. They just want to sound reasonable. When you read the motion, it sounds reasonable, but when you actually look into it further, when you dissect that motion, it is truly not what it reads as. When you say the word "taxes"—I think Tories think it's a dirty word, because they don't know how to use taxes. What we need to do is make sure that people understand what taxes are used for.

We need to look a little more dispassionately at the reasons why we pay taxes in Canada and what we get for them. We are investing in our communities. We are investing in society when we contribute to our taxes. Taxes are part of our economic and social fabric. They are the very foundation that enables our society to function and our ability to live healthy and productive lives. That's what our taxes should be used for. That's what our taxes are intended to do.

So what do we get for our taxes? According to Canadians for Tax Fairness, the average Canadian household receives around \$41,000 in public services a year. That's what we're paying for—public services—when we contribute to our society.

Tax dollars pay for firefighters, police services, protect our water and food supplies, and keep green spaces up and running, all of which contribute to our personal health and well-being. Provincially, schools, hospitals, roads, parks, courts and public transit all come from what citizens contribute, out of our pockets, for taxes, for our investment in our society.

We're all responsible for our public infrastructure that we use on a daily basis. I remember when the 407 was built; that was built on our taxes. The Tories, the Harris government, sold it, and we're still paying to use public infrastructure that we paid for. What a horrible use of our taxes. They also cut social services to the point where

they relegated people to poverty, and we're still seeing the effects of that today.

This is why we need to understand what the Tories are about. It sounds reasonable, it sounds good, but it isn't going to work when you cut taxes. You can't deliver services like our hospitals that we depend on, like the mental health care that we depend on, like the schools in their communities where they want to stop closures—this is what our taxes are being used for. To stand there and say that we need not to raise taxes, that we need to cut taxes—we need to use the investment that we're already getting from the public wisely and not use it in a way—and I'll kind of bash the Liberals. When we close gas plants, at a billion dollars, when we whittle it away on eHealth, at billions of dollars, when we're paying the CEO of Hydro One \$4.5 million, that is not what people want their investment to be used for and spent on. They want to see that come back to them as a public good. That's what taxes are for.

When we speak to people and we tell them why we're taking their money and what we're using it for—to help society—people understand that. Tories don't understand that. They want to make sure their rich friends keep their money and continually have those tax loopholes to avoid paying taxes so that they can maintain their wealth. We want to have a fair society, and that's why we think that when taxes are used appropriately, everyone benefits in society.

I have to tell you, I don't agree with this motion. I would vote against it. I would make sure that people who are voting in this election—please, get informed as to what Tories are really about. They're not about those bumper sticker slogans. They sound good, but it's just a shiny object. They're trying to take your attention away from the real issues of what they are going to do when they are elected: They're going to cut taxes; they're going to lay off hospital workers; they're going to lay off educational workers, because you can't do what they are promising without cuts. It's not efficiencies; they're cuts. When you talk about making sure that taxes get lowered, you have to look at the cuts.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Jeff Leal: It's a great opportunity to share a few words this afternoon and get on the record with the motion put forward by my friend from Haldimand—Norfolk.

I was a city councillor in Peterborough from 1985 until the fall of 2003. I remember the Harris years very well. They were clever. Oh, my goodness, Speaker, they were clever. When they formed the government in 1995, they knew how to get rid of costs that would never be on their books again. I was at AMO in Ottawa in 1998-99. The Premier was there: a very nice speech. What he told them there—the Who Does What committee was going to be revenue-neutral.

I was at the back of the room. I was with the chief administrative officer for the city of Peterborough. I turned to Brian Horton and said, "Brian, I grew up in the south

end of Peterborough and I know I have south-end Peterborough math, but there's no darn way this is going to be revenue-neutral."

So for those of us, like my friend from Northumberland—Quinte West, who was the very distinguished mayor of Brighton in those days—we knew well, because we renamed that commission. It was the "who got done in" commission. Madam Speaker, who got done in? The answer is: the municipalities of the province of Ontario.

Over the last decade—we talk about deficits here. One of the reasons why is because we uploaded. We took back about \$4 billion. If we hadn't done that, we could have been in a surplus position virtually every year. But that wasn't the responsible thing to do. The responsible thing to do was to help out our municipal partners.

I keep a copy in my office in Peterborough. It is the report by Justice O'Connor, who looked into that tragedy of all tragedies in the province of Ontario: the inquiry into Walkerton. Madam Speaker, for one moment, I beg you to take the opportunity to look at that report, because when you go through that report, you'll see that cutbacks in staff at the Ministry of the Environment and water inspectors contributed directly to those deaths and those people in the Walkerton area who will forever be maimed because of consuming water contaminated with *E. coli*. That's a fact. That was in Justice O'Connor's report.

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When you look at the United States and look at those budgets, do you know some of the greatest growth in the United States was during the time of President Bill Clinton? What did Bill Clinton do? He raised taxes. The reason that Bill Clinton raised taxes was to provide additional services to citizens of the United States.

But then you look at those years with Ronald Reagan, that city on that shining hill. He cut taxes, and it was one of the deepest recessions ever in the United States.

Then you fast forward to the second George Bush. So what did the second George Bush do? Oh, he loved that tax-cutting mantra too. What did that do? It drove the United States over the fiscal cliff. Don't take my word for it, Madam Speaker. Get the legislative library to look at the Congressional Budget Office analysis, that non-partisan group that looks at budgetary measures in the United States.

For those who love President Trump and go down to Mar-a-Lago and play golf with him, here's another one: Take a look at that analysis. Do you know what the sad commentary is? The next great recession could be embedded in those tax cuts and what it's going to do to the world economy. Again, don't take my word for it. Read the analysis by the Congressional Budget Office.

You have to have a level of taxation. When you look at what's happening in Ontario—I mean, look at page 183. I love those numbers. Right now, the unemployment rate, at 5.5%, is the lowest that it has been in the province of Ontario in 17 years.

There was a comment about the farm economy. Well, just yesterday, I read the analysis put out by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. They're predicting a much more

buoyant farm economy. Prices will be up, incomes will be up, and we will keep maintaining supply management in the province of Ontario and have our non-supply-managed group take advantage of a new trade deal. It's contributing to the largest sector in our economy today: \$37.5 billion, 800,000 jobs, predicated on 50,000 family farms.

There's now a new term that's being used in American politics. It's called "fabulist": F-A-B-U-L-I-S-T. I encourage people to look up what that new definition is that's being used in American politics.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I must say that hearing my neighbour, the member for Haldimand—Norfolk, bring forward such a practical, really reasonable motion before the House, one that I too deem to be a bit of an olive branch—I thought it was a very practical motion that would at least reach some level of consensus in the Legislature.

But I've got to say, Madam Speaker, when I go home to Niagara and I talk to people, they say, "There seems to be a bubble at Queen's Park. There seems to be a lack of understanding at Queen's Park of what people are going through." I've got to say that never in my time here—and I've only been here a year and a half, so I know it's not a lot of time—has that suspicion of my constituents been validated the way that it has been this afternoon.

To listen to the members of the New Democratic Party and the members of the Ontario Liberal Party stand in this Legislature and act as though the best thing imaginable for the citizens of Ontario, the solution—the golden chalice, if you will—to any ills that might avail us, any ills that might be on our doorsteps, is, in fact, increasing taxes and taking more money away from the hard-working people of Ontario is mind-bogglingly naive; it's ill-intentioned. I don't think it's even malignant, but it is, quite frankly, arrogantly ridiculous.

To hear the members in this House stand and pontificate at length about the good of taxes and how we should increase taxes, and how 20 years ago they didn't like the way things were done—first of all, the old Tory slogan that came from the New Democrats. In 1995, I wasn't even a glimmer in my parents' eyes. I wasn't born for several more years. So they can point back at that time if they wish. But the facts speak very clearly, Madam Speaker. I'm not sure how many members in this House have taken some economics courses, but I think they should, because there are very basic economic facts. The reality is that a GDP—gross domestic product, for those of you who don't know—is made up of CIGX. It's made up of consumption, investment, government expenditures, and of course net exports. Now, when you have a recessionary gap, you pursue an expansionary fiscal policy. One of the ways that you can do this is by spending more, which this government has no problem doing, but you still have to ask the question of where that money comes from.

You can increase your GDP in two very simple ways: You can increase government expenditures, or you can

reduce taxes. Reducing taxes is a basic economic incentive for growth. I think one of the interesting numbers that's hidden in the Liberal budgets, the one they don't really want to talk about too much, is that their own growth rate projections are on the decline. If you look at their growth rate projections for labour markets here in the province of Ontario over the next six years, we see those projections go from 120,000 jobs created, roughly, to 60,000 jobs. In that analysis, it states, as a very clear reason for these job losses, or the slowing down in the increase of jobs, the American tax cuts.

Now, I'm not saying we need to look at those types of tax cuts, but the fact of the matter is, they're putting us at an economic disadvantage. They are putting us at a competitive disadvantage. When you speak to manufacturers, when you speak to those who are doing their best—the job creators in our communities who are attempting to make a difference—when you speak to those who are being taxed, another \$2-billion increase in taxes in this budget, they look at the United States.

Madam Speaker, I'm the PC critic for research, innovation and science—or the associate critic, I should say, with deference to my colleague—and one of the biggest problems we have in our tech sector is a brain drain. We are seeing all our talented young people move to the United States: Silicon Valley; Boston, Massachusetts. One of the reasons? The tax rate is so incredibly high it's not worth them staying here. They can make less but get taxed less, and they are still making more in the United States.

We are losing our best and our brightest to the United States because we've seen Ontario as a jurisdiction become one of the highest-taxed jurisdictions in North America. Quite frankly, it's shameful; it's ridiculous. I can't believe what I am hearing from the government, and it validates all the concerns that my constituents have when they hear a Liberal government stand up and talk about prosperity and hope. They've become cynical because this government, quite frankly, has become cynical and thinks it can pull the wool over the eyes of the Ontario taxpayer. The time is coming that Ontario taxpayers will be listened to and respected.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Madam Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to this motion. You know, I have spent time in some of Canada's largest corporations as well as in start-ups, and I realize that lowering taxes on businesses may seem like an attractive proposition. But you have to think about the fact that our tax dollars need to reach across society. There's a role for taxes in society and in government.

When the Progressive Conservatives, the opposition, put forward a motion such as this, I see a lot revealed in the difference in the values and the choices that Ontarians have to make, because when you talk about reducing taxes for businesses, for the wealthy, what you are really saying is that you are going to cut services and that you're going to cut programs and that people are going to

experience pain. I remember that pain. I remember in the mid-1990s, when programs and services for people on Ontario Works—Madam Speaker, they balanced the books of this province on some of the most vulnerable people. I worked in that sector, as well, and tried to show people how they can pick themselves up, despite the fact that government was not there for them. It caused a lot of pain. I think that in some ways we're still repairing that pain today with our budget that we put forward just yesterday, which raises ODSP and OW by 3% each year for the next three years. It's actually just repairing some of that pain, that crushing burden that was inflicted on individuals.

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When I hear about reduction of taxes for businesses, for the wealthiest people in this province, I think about that pain, and I say that it's not worth it. It's not worth us going down that road again, because we know what it yields. It yields people who oftentimes are in despair and it causes an additional burden on our society.

I think the people of Ontario have a choice to make. I would urge them to reject this trickle-down economic theory that really doesn't reach the people who are in need, and instead to continue on the path that we are on. Ontario's GDP is actually the highest among OECD countries. We are leading economic growth. We've got the lowest unemployment. We've recovered all of the jobs that were lost in the great recession of 2008, and we are on a path that supports people in this province, from children to families to people in the middle class to our seniors. That's what we are doing.

Interjection: And students.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Absolutely; our students. We're creating more access to post-secondary education than ever before. We're graduating more students from high school than under the system that that party was responsible for.

I reject this motion. I think it's a bad motion. I think it's bad for the people of this province, and it's a disguise that means cuts, cuts, cuts and pain for people.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's an honour to rise to speak to this motion sponsored by the member from Haldimand-Norfolk.

Over the long life of this government, we've seen taxes collected by them more than double. Far too often, we've seen fees increased as well, to often more than is actually required to cover the cost. We saw a study out just a little while ago showing that vital statistics documents costs are much higher than it actually costs the government to put them out.

If you go back to pre-2003, increasing taxes was a huge issue. The then leader of this Liberal Party, Dalton McGuinty, signed a document guaranteeing that they would not raise taxes in power. Of course, we all saw, within a very few months—I think two months—of taking power, the health tax: the largest tax in Canadian history. What does he do then? He takes the Canadian

Taxpayers Federation to court to prove that he can do that; he doesn't have to follow his promises. That's what we expect from this government when we see promises coming forth.

Then you look at the 2007 election, with this court ruling under their belt. They promised, again, no taxes, and we saw the HST come in—another large tax increase by this government.

We talk about the 2014 election campaign. The people never heard a promise to create a carbon tax or a cap-and-trade tax. That was not mentioned until the majority government came in, and now, all of a sudden, it was a necessity. Again we see something that is committed during the election campaign—just like many of these goodies in this election that we will never see.

Hearing the member for Timiskaming, I was a little bit worried he might need some medical help in here, but I think he needs to tell the full story of what happened back then. I was in municipal politics. I remember the Harris government coming in and I remember the dark days of the NDP government, who were paying almost as much in interest as we were on health care. You can imagine that. Interest rates went up as high as 20%. They were no longer 1%, like they are today. That's the truth.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Order.

Interjection.

Mr. Jim McDonell: No, they weren't. Not the—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Members, speak through the Chair. It's not dialogue amongst the members.

I will return to the member.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. In our township of South Glengarry, more than 6% of our taxes went to fund schools, and we had no control over that. Every year, the school board would simply deliver the tax bill to us, and we collected it and we took the flak for it. So, yes, they uploaded most of that school bill and they downloaded some others. People are forgetting that. I remember the municipalities at the time were very happy with that decision. They were not against it.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, that is so far off. That is an outright lie. That's a lie. We were spending \$40 billion in health care—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Order.

Mr. Jim McDonell: They absolutely were; I was there.

So when you look at—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Order. It's never too late to name somebody, and I believe some people have already been warned from this morning.

I will return to the member.

Mr. Jim McDonell: When you look at some of the results of taking more and more money from businesses—the member must remember Xstrata moving into Quebec. When you start raising costs—in that case, it was the price of electricity, something that they joined the government to support in the Green Energy Act. But

that's the result: We have less and less people with jobs. In SD&G, where I am from, we lost over 3,000 jobs in 2006. Those jobs never came back.

I guess you can brag that you've got back to the 2008 level, but our population is substantially more than it was back then, and we are not seeing the jobs and we are certainly not seeing the good jobs.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk to wrap up.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I really appreciate the comments from all parties, particularly members like myself who were in this House during that 1996 budget debate—certainly, the member from Timmins–James Bay and the member from St. Catharines. It's like old times. It just seems like yesterday, in many ways.

I appreciate the passion, the debate. Some may have been expecting a regular sleepy Thursday afternoon debate. That was my purpose: to raise the level of debate, to get people talking about taxation policy, to get a discussion going with respect to public finance, and, in this case, what I considered a healthy discussion.

I do get a kick out of that line: same old Tory, same old story. We just heard from the Tory MPP for Niagara West–Glanbrook. He would have been negative two years old at the time of that 1996 budget.

There was mention made of the Mike Harris Who Does What exercise. Municipalities took on responsibility for certain roads and a plethora of other services. At that time—I remember it clearly, as a property owner—we did what property taxpayers asked us to do: to take the cost of education off property.

My constituency office is in the town of Simcoe. Before we did that, the residents and homeowners in the town of Simcoe—and there were a few farms—saw 60% of their property taxes go to fund education, and they had no decision-making authority over where that money went.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will vote on this item at the end of private members' public business.

RURAL ONTARIO

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should recognize that rural Ontario plays an integral role in the success and growth of this province as a whole, and should therefore continue to build on our record of investments in broadband, infrastructure, natural resources, and other key industries and services.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to be here today to talk a little bit about some of the things that are important mostly to rural Ontario, and northern Ontario, in some cases. I certainly appreciate that opportunity. I want to talk about its valuable role in the success and growth of the province. I hope everyone here will support this mo-

tion to ensure that the government of Ontario continues to build on those strong foundations that we laid and to move forward.

It's no secret—and this kind of follows in the steps of the last motion—that when the PCs were in government, they downloaded 43% of the roads and bridges onto municipalities.

I was a municipal member at that time. As a matter of fact, I was the mayor of the municipality of Brighton at the time. I remember first-hand the destructive policy of the Conservatives that forced municipalities to look at other options, and in many cases they weren't that pretty. Since then, we've been working to dig rural communities, frankly, out of the ditch. You have heard some of the uploading that has taken place, some \$4 billion.

1430

In opposition, they have—I must say that every movement this government has initiated to bring back civility in our communities and to help folks in need, the opposition, mostly the Conservatives, have been an obstruction to that recovery.

I am very proud to be part of a government that is committed to building a strong rural Ontario, and that includes helping rural communities address their infrastructure needs. Because, you see, in rural Ontario we don't have subways and we don't have streetcars. Our transit infrastructure is county roads and bridges that allow our people and emergency vehicles to get from one side of town to the other or from one community to the other.

We have instituted a number of core programs to bring back that help to rural Ontario; for example, the OCIF fund. This helps rural communities, which can now depend on stable commitments, with a \$200-million-a-year distribution to municipalities below 100,000 population and \$100 million through an application base to help rebuild some of those roads that were downloaded. We have committed to tripling that, as I said, to \$300 million by 2019. It's been a welcome breath of fresh air, especially in smaller communities.

Another fund, the main street revitalization fund, helps small downtown—this is a \$26-million main street revitalization program that we initiated just this past fall. It was announced at the AMO convention. This initiative is part of a \$40-million investment over three years to the main street enhancement initiative, which also supports enhancing the digital presence and capability of small businesses through increased access to digital tools like e-commerce, which is supported by the \$12-million Digital Main Street Initiative.

I was here in 2007 when we initiated the Eastern Ontario Development Fund. I believe, shortly after 2011, lo and behold, there was a Southwestern Ontario Development Fund. This was a \$20-million fund for each to help businesses grow and to incent new start-ups and businesses. It's been one of the best funds when it comes to economic development in southern Ontario.

Let me speak about broadband a little bit. We've come some way. I remember, back under the previous regime, I

was on county council. We got our first laptops because we were going to do away with paper. I was excited. I knew nothing of what was going to happen with this laptop that I got from Northumberland county. Well, we were going to have our very first paperless agenda—wow. So I got home—I was so excited. I turned it on and then I called one of my grandkids to help me navigate the system. We only had dial-up where I was. I'm not sure if some younger folks here know what dial up is. I could not download my agenda. So we have made some progress, Madam Speaker.

Just yesterday, in our 2018-19 budget, we committed \$500 million over three years to help communities across rural and northern Ontario have broadband infrastructure in place to serve business, to serve the first responders, and of course, a lot of people work from home now, Madam Speaker.

I'm delighted to say that there was a commitment in the budget of \$71 million towards improving cellular coverage in eastern Ontario, which will help enable access to secure broadband services in rural and remote areas. I know some of my colleagues here from both sides of the House from eastern Ontario will appreciate this, because that's something that the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus has been advocating for. And I know, Madam Speaker, you yourself attended some of those meetings. This is a big boost, to bring that kind of connectivity to rural Ontario. Our government has invested roughly, over the years, some \$490 million since 2007, to be specific, to upgrade broadband infrastructure across this province.

My God, I'm running out of time.

Madam Speaker, that part of the project is completed through, once again, the Eastern Ontario Regional Network, EORN: some 50,000 square kilometres, as a result, with some high-speed and fibre connections. That was a commitment—and I was part of the government of the day when we committed \$55 million, and the federal government committed \$55 million, to lay that foundation. Like what I just read a minute ago, it's just a process.

I want to congratulate, under the leadership of Jim Pine, CAO of Hastings county, and Gary King, CAO of Peterborough county, the total Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus for the commitment to form EORN and to be able to deliver these services.

Interjection: Good guys.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: They're very good guys. They're hard-working.

Speaker, I want to talk about the importance of the type of technology when it comes to broadband speeds and so forth. The best way I can relate to it is personal experiences. My wife had some back issues over the last year. She was supposed to come to Women's College Hospital just east of here. The specialist called and said, "No, no, you don't have to come. We don't have to make an appointment here in my office." She had to go three kilometres from my house to the Brighton Quinte West Family Health Team building. They had a room set up

with—I think it was about a 40-inch TV screen. She spent 40 minutes consulting with a specialist from Women's College Hospital.

Can you imagine that kind of service? I know the people in the GTA and Ottawa have those services, but I was just blown away that we can now offer those kinds of services. She spent about half an hour on the phone prior to going, talking about her past history, and then 40 minutes on the TV screen.

So I would say to you that broadband is very, very important. As I said a minute ago, we've already invested those kinds of dollars.

I would urge everybody in this House to keep in mind that rural Ontario is just as important as urban Ontario. We have our specific needs. I've been privileged, since the election in 2014, through my mandate letter from the Premier, to sort of keep an oversight on any issues that impact rural Ontario. As you can tell, I'm very passionate; it's what I care about. That's why the motion today. I'm delighted that, in yesterday's budget, our Premier and our Minister of Finance made those steps towards addressing those needs.

The needs are great. I talked a lot about infrastructure and broadband, but health care is also very, very important. I'm one of the members—I'm sure there aren't too many of us here that have three hospitals in their riding. I tell you, the technology is changing today. We need to make sure that those hospitals that provide that vital care—we have, in Cobourg, one of the largest seniors' communities. That's just one community of us elderly folks. They're the ones that, frankly, need more help in general. We've got to make sure we have the infrastructure, whether it's through good roads, bridges, broadband or whatever the case may be. I think it's really, really important.

1440

We're certainly not in a position for cutbacks. There were 28 hospitals closed when I came into government in 2003. I was able to stop two of them because I found that list, Madam Speaker. Campbellford Memorial Hospital was going to close. Trenton Memorial Hospital: I had to fight for it as mayor to protect it because it was on that dreaded list.

We're not going to go back to those days—under no circumstance.

I just urge all of us here to make sure that we treat rural Ontario and northern Ontario in the same way, as one Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate this motion. I appreciate it in the sense that it's similar—it's not nearly as comprehensive, but it's similar to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's Producing Prosperity document, which is, I feel, a very well-written policy proposal.

As pointed out in the OFA Producing Prosperity document, rural Ontario farms, businesses and communities—we are struggling. We're struggling to be competitive and to be sustainable.

Reliable Internet: I think that was mentioned. It's not widely available. I have to walk to my front door to get coverage sometimes when I am using my cellphone.

Infrastructure: I think of culverts that are oftentimes not up to par.

Property taxes rise every year.

Labour is an issue; labour is hard to find—this is serious.

Schools are closing, and opportunities for young people to remain in the community continue to dwindle. That has been going on for decades. Simply put, as far as rural business, higher input costs make it very difficult to compete with neighbouring jurisdictions and urban areas, for that matter.

I find that the OFA proposal is unique in that it also addresses challenges in growing urban areas and offers a rural perspective that can help with areas of interest like pockets of poverty, congestion, longer commutes—obviously using fossil fuel in most cases—the housing crisis, and population pressures in the cities and the large urban areas, on infrastructure.

I talk about infrastructure, and I do caution—and this is a bit of a spending bill. Ontario's Auditor General has identified potential cost overruns beyond 25% in so many of the infrastructure projects coming from this government. Again, as far as these kinds of ideas: Who pays? What level of government pays? We do know that the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund comes up short—\$70 million cut over the last five years.

Natural gas is not mentioned in the motion before us. I regret that. There will be discussion on that. I heat with wood, for example; I can't afford to pay the electricity to heat my home.

There are concerns. We are concerned with funding formulas. Oftentimes they can be skewed towards urban areas. We're concerned about, perhaps, an overemphasis or discussion on big-city transit and maybe less discussion about the culverts I was talking about, let alone the bridges and the rural roads.

I appreciate the initiative. Rural Ontario oftentimes is ignored and is not known. One of our farms, where I live, runs from Shand's Corner down to The Winding Hill. I don't hear much discussion about those communities here in the Legislature. I have moved from my dad's farm to my grandfather's farm, so I'm closer to The Winding Hill. I guess, if I count the cattle in the area, we're a population of maybe 30—something like that.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to rise in this House, and specifically so this afternoon, to speak to the member from Northumberland—Quinte West's motion. I appreciate the motion very much any time we have an opportunity in this House to talk about rural Ontario simply because the number of people in rural Ontario isn't as large as in urban Ontario; that's why we have cities and the country. Our needs are different and need to be discussed more. I thank the member for

allowing us to spend a few minutes this afternoon talking about rural Ontario.

Just a shout-out to everybody in rural Ontario: It is a fantastic place to live. We have some issues, as does everyone.

I now live here six months a year. I've never lived in a village before and now I'm here six months a year. It's quite a shock. People here have huge challenges and they have some advantages. We also have huge challenges but we also have advantages. With our challenges, we have the ability to work through them, but over the years some of those challenges have been increased by some of the decisions made in this place.

It's been a very interesting afternoon because I was also a municipal councillor when a lot of the roads in my municipality and neighbouring municipalities that were provincial highways were downloaded to the municipalities. They weren't equipped to deal with that then. Part of the problem, where municipalities are so cash-starved now, is that they were never equipped to deal with it. The costs are astronomical. We had a discussion today about not raising taxes and how the Harris Conservatives didn't raise taxes. They just downloaded the responsibility to the same taxpayer, but they weren't directly responsible. That's not responsible government—it isn't. I think one of the things that rural Ontario constantly faces is that they always have to fight for the attention of all parties to make sure that government stays responsible for the problems in rural Ontario.

We've heard a lot today about broadband. I have a note here that the McGuinty government commissioned a report in 2009 talking about the importance of broadband. But we are at 2018, almost 10 years later, and there are still places in northern Ontario—and I really know northern Ontario—where you might as well watch Star Wars.

I've got a municipality in my riding, a beautiful town: French River. Close to there is a little village. Every year they have a Christmas dinner—and I go there every year—to save the school, which is also a big issue in northern Ontario. I was there a little bit too early. They have a general store so I went there. My cellphone had not worked for a couple of miles, so I went to talk to the general store. I said, "You don't have very good cellphone service here." She said, "Oh, no, sir, we do; we have cellphone service. If you go down the hill three kilometres, or to the abandoned rail line just up the road, you'll have cellphone service." I said, "Well, how are your land lines?" And she goes, "Oh, the land lines are fine." I said, "Really? Because I was just in St.-Charles for their Christmas parade. We had a meeting regarding that there was a house that burned down and they couldn't get 911 service. There was no land line service because it was raining. I was just in St.-Charles and they said they don't have land line service when it rains." And she looked at me, Speaker, and she said, "Well, everyone knows that telephones don't work when it rains." She wasn't kidding.

We have huge issues in the Far North—huge. But this isn't the Far North; this is rural Ontario. So we have a long way to go, because in that town, and in many towns and villages across the province, you cannot operate a business in this century. We all know that. We need to work for that.

1450

We had our issues with the downloads from the Harris Conservatives, but we've also had our issues with the current government. We were just talking about broadband in northeastern Ontario. One of the advantages, one of the decisions that the government had made was, in the area where it didn't make sense for commercial people to develop the broadband sector, they got the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission to put in Ontera. They had high-speed Internet service. They put in fibre optic lines. That was going to be our key.

Speaker, do you know what the government did with that fibre optic line? They gave it away. They sold it for, I believe, \$6 million. They tried to divest the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission, and they—I'll get to the train in a second, but the second thing, we didn't have time to stop them. They gave that—I think they got \$6 million for it and it cost them, I think, \$60 million to get the legal work done. They gave it to Bell. And do you know what? "Oh, no, Bell, they are great; they are going to provide better service. Do you know why? They're really in the business of doing this stuff."

You know how private companies are always so great at serving rural areas. So now the folks in Temagami, who used to be served by Ontera, are now served by Bell. But they can't get service. My daughter buys a house—beautiful spot. You want to buy a house in northern Ontario? I can show you some beautiful spots, as long as you don't want Internet really badly.

It was supposed to be serviced by Ontera. It has where you call Ontera. You call Ontera, which is now owned by Bell, and they say, "Oh, no, we don't service that anymore." We had something that could actually be used to provide better service for rural Ontario, or at least for my part of rural Ontario, northeastern Ontario, and the government chose to give it away. Six million dollars: What does that get you in today's dollars?

Another example of what's going to happen to rural Ontario, and why I and my colleagues are so opposed to the sale of Hydro One—it's not just the price, or it's not the cost of the hydro, but a private company, their role—and I am not against private companies. I am not against people making a profit. I have a problem, we have a problem with the profit in essential services, because in the long run, despite what the rules will say and despite what the Ontario Energy Board is going to rule, a private company is not going to want to spend a lot of money maintaining the back roads in rural Ontario, because it's not a profit centre for them. So in the long run, you're going to get more power outages and you're going to get a lot more issues in rural Ontario because it won't be serviced the same by a private company as by a public entity.

If you want an example, look at the Internet. Down here, we have great Internet service because it pays the companies to compete and actually provide it; out in the hinterlands, not so much. That's why we are so, so focused on keeping the control of Hydro One in public hands, so we can direct Hydro One to actually provide adequate service to all the people in Ontario.

In the couple of minutes I have left, I think the issue that rural Ontario faces and will always face, and we need to get over this, is that government programs tend to be provided based on population. And I understand that. If I look at Brampton, the population of Brampton is exploding, and that's just—lots of places here, but we'll use Brampton as an example. The population is exploding. They have huge needs. They need new infrastructure—understood.

The population in many parts of rural Ontario isn't exploding. In some places, it's declining. It's staying about equal, right? But the productivity of rural Ontario is exploding. Rural Ontario is the cornerstone of the biggest industry in this province, but the people who are living at that cornerstone, the people who are actually the foundation of those jobs, also need access to services. Those services shouldn't be based on population; they should be based on productivity. If you think about that—they need schools.

There is not a shortage of jobs in rural Ontario. There are lots of jobs. Our problem is getting people, getting families to come. In my hometown, we have really well-paying jobs available. Families come to look—well, the Internet? How do we travel? There is one highway that is sometimes not cleaned very well in the wintertime. They just shake their heads and leave. It's the access. We need the services, and the services need to be based on productivity, and we haven't done that, Speaker; we haven't.

That's why the infrastructure across rural Ontario is falling apart: because everything is based for roads. We actually need bigger roads in rural Ontario now than we did 20 years ago, because the machinery that farmers use is a lot bigger. But there's a lot less people, so you're looking at less taxpayers, because a lot of the roads were downloaded. But even with what the province does, they're not looking at productivity; they're looking at population.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Let me tell you, it's a great privilege this afternoon to speak about the motion that has been put forward by my friend and colleague the member from Northumberland—Quinte West. On June 7, he will be representing part of my Peterborough riding when he becomes the MPP for Northumberland—Peterborough South. They look forward to that day in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Rinaldi is one of those great Canadian success stories. I know that Mr. Rinaldi came from Italy when he was 12 years old. He was born in a small community south of Rome. He wanted to come to Canada; he wanted to come to Ontario, the land of opportunity.

He became a very skilled mechanic through Fiat, and opened a garage, a small business, in Pickering, Ontario. He and Diane raised a family. He grew that business, and then he wanted something more. He decided to sell that business in Pickering and move to beautiful Brighton, Ontario. So Mr. Rinaldi and Diane and the kids moved to Brighton, Ontario. He takes his business experience and technical experience to put together the Brighton Speedway.

Madam Speaker, if you want a good opportunity on a Saturday night during the summer months, I can assure you that the hot dogs are good and the beer is cold. So go to Brighton Speedway to see a small business operation.

Through that process, Lou Rinaldi became part of Brighton, through the Rotary Club, through the Knights of Columbus, eventually becoming a councillor in Brighton and then becoming the mayor of Brighton, leading up to the 2003 election.

The reason that Mr. Rinaldi was a candidate in that 2003 election was because he saw hope and opportunity in the platform that was being put forward by the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr. McGuinty. He continues to build on that legacy.

I know he doesn't want me to tell this story, but I'm going to tell it anyway, because it's important.

Leading up to the 2007 election, Mr. Rinaldi toured eastern Ontario extensively. He was, of course, in his hometown of Brighton, and Belleville, Brockville, Cornwall, Kemptville—you name it, he was there. Out of that experience, of course, he came up with the idea of the Eastern Ontario Development Fund, which became part of our platform in 2007. After we got the privilege of being elected as government in 2007, the Ministry of Economic Development and Growth enshrined that in eastern Ontario. Then we brought that to western Ontario.

1500

The fact of the matter is, in rural Ontario today we have 1.4% of the population supporting 98.6%. That 1.4% tells me how productive and how innovative they are. I think that was echoed by my friend from Timiskaming—Cochrane.

This is a very good motion. We need to support it. When you look at what is incorporated in the budget in terms of broadband and, more importantly—to address the problem articulated by the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane—our opportunity of connectivity through satellite service: Get rid of those towers so we can provide comprehensive coverage.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I stand to support this resolution because I think that for too long, especially under this government, we have ignored rural Ontario. Rural Ontario should not be considered only a place to produce food for urban areas, to produce their power and as a place to put their garbage. This government talks about using the agri-food industry to grow jobs: We are that

place. As the minister was saying, it's 1.4% of the population serving 98%.

About broadband: I worked at Bell Canada for many years. When I first joined, we were looking at placing copper cables, back in the 1970s. That was the new technology. It wasn't until the 2000s that high-speed came in. The technology moved very quickly. The cities got the technology, which made sense, because that's where the business case was.

I hear the member from—

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Cochrane.

Mr. Jim McDonell: —yes—talking about the technology and the problems they have with telephone cable. Well, this cable goes back to the 1970s. It's a problem. We need to work with these private companies—be it Bell or whoever—to allow them to replace that, to make that business case possible.

I was part of the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus when we brought the last project for high-speed service. At that time, we as a township were lucky—I was there, in South Glengarry—we had served most of the hamlets with DSL. For what was left, there was no business case, even with government grants, to go with DSL, so we had to move to wireless. At that time, 1-Meg service was the best they had.

Just a couple of years before, Inukshuk Technologies came out with 1-Meg service. Bell had gone out and done a business case for providing rural areas with this 1-Meg service. The government looked at the project and said, "No, we'd rather deploy that in Toronto." So they went back and deployed it in Toronto. By the time they got it in Toronto, nobody wanted the service.

When we came along with our project in 2005-06, they were taking that technology out and putting it where we were, to service the rural customers. At that time, nobody wanted one-meg service in the country either, but it was much better than 64K, which was the ultimate for copper service.

At that time, cell service would handle six to 12 megabytes. I talked to the ministry and I said, "Why are we placing this equipment? Maybe it's too late for us, because the project has been awarded," but at that time the rest of eastern Ontario was looking for high-speed Internet. The ministry said, "We can't support a telephone company in putting in high-speed." I said, "You leave your offices in Toronto, you drive all the way to Montreal, you talk on the cellphone, but get off the 401 and there's no cell service. You don't understand what rural Ontario has."

Anyway, the history is what it is. This government's ministries would refuse to address cell service and combine the two into one, which would be basically what the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus is now asking for. We've wasted those hundreds of millions of dollars and have not moved to where we should have moved.

Yes, we are now looking at fibre and moving to the next generation, but this is where you've got to go. Farming technologies now require cell service to properly plant their crops with some of the new GPS technology.

But in many places, it's not there. They have to bring an equivalent cell service to the fields. And when they go out to the fields, they need to deal with suppliers. They need adequate cell service.

I think if you work with these private companies and allow them to get rid of the old technology—there's no business case if you going to place fibre to the home and also have to maintain copper for the 5% of the people who want it.

I have to go because I know other people want to talk, but you have to work with them and get the best plan possible, not bury our heads in the sand and put old technology in.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon on behalf of my constituents in Cambridge and also North Dumfries township. I'm also pleased this afternoon to support the member from Northumberland-Quinte West's motion on rural Ontario. I will be speaking in favour of the motion and would like to thank the member very much for his hard work in bringing this important private member's motion forward.

I really welcome any opportunity to rise in this House and in this Legislature to talk about rural Ontario. I think that many members here are well aware that I live in the rural part of Cambridge riding, which is North Dumfries township. North Dumfries township is almost a U-shaped municipality that surrounds the urban part of my riding, which is Cambridge. North Dumfries township is 10,000 people strong, and I am very happy to have lived there for 29 years. My neighbours are farmers. In our area, they grow corn and soybean, and they raise cattle. There are horses. Chicken farms are not far away. I really love the municipality that I represent there.

I know that our government has taken a number of steps over a few years to support rural Ontario. I also know that the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs takes his responsibility on behalf of all of the communities in rural Ontario very seriously. Recently, I welcomed some of his staff to host a rural round table in my community of North Dumfries township. It was very, very well attended. I know that the notes being taken from that certainly helped to inform this budget process.

Our government has made historic investments to expand natural gas in rural communities across the province, which helps families and businesses to cut their heating costs and also to assist them with their farming operations. We've also provided funding to expand access to broadband in rural communities throughout Ontario.

As Minister of Transportation, I'm very proud of our government's commitment to supporting the infrastructure needs of our municipal partners in rural Ontario. Nothing shows that commitment more clearly than our government's decision to triple the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund to \$300 million by 2019 to help rural municipalities build and upgrade their roads, their bridges and also their water systems. Rural communities

can now depend on that stable, predictable and bankable funding to make the critical investments they need in their communities that will support them in the long term.

I know very definitely that the mayor of North Dumfries, Mayor Sue Foxton, and the CAO and council are very pleased about the funding to assist them with their long-term capital projects. They have a good asset management plan, including a cycling strategy for North Dumfries, and are very pleased for the investments that we're making.

Because our government heard that supporting Connecting Links through the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund program wasn't enough, we reintroduced the new Connecting Links Program based on feedback when we held it for a couple of years. So we did listen to our rural folks in bringing this program back.

I'm pleased that, for 2018-19, we increased the available funding to \$30 million, up from \$25 million the year previously. I was, just a few short weeks ago, very pleased to be in West Perth to announce the 22 municipalities across the province that will be receiving funding for the 2018-19 year. They were very pleased about this.

The Connecting Links funding covers up to 90% of eligible project costs, to a maximum of \$3 million. I know that the feedback has been very positive on these pieces. But it also includes the design, construction, renewal, rehabilitation and replacement of Connecting Links infrastructure.

We also know about the importance of supporting job growth in rural and small communities, so just this month, I was pleased to announce that southwestern Ontario will receive up to \$5.2 million through our Main Street Revitalization Initiative, which will help municipalities undertake main street revitalization activities that support and directly benefit small businesses.

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Certainly, the village of Ayr in my own municipality can apply for up to \$44,000. This is the year to do it because they are actually redeveloping the main street in Ayr. I was very proud of that.

I was also pleased, recently, to be at Bend All Automotive in Ayr to announce that our partnerships will help create more than 90 jobs and support close to 800 existing jobs in Ayr and in Woodstock. It's also in addition to an announcement that I made this past summer on our partnership with Unilock, also in my community of Ayr, to create 16 new jobs. There's no question that we have more to do and that rural communities face unique challenges, and governments at all levels have a responsibility to respond.

I'm also pleased to see that in budget 2018, our government is investing another \$500 million over three years to expand broadband connectivity in rural and northern communities, including North Dumfries township, who have applied through the region to increase broadband in my community. I know that our Liberal government continues to invest in rural Ontario. I'm very proud of the commitments to date.

I'm sharing this time, too, with the member for Beaches–East York, whom I'll leave the last couple of minutes to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm pleased to debate in support of this motion from my colleague from Northumberland–Quinte West.

One of the biggest priorities for rural Ontario has been access to broadband specifically, because many of the households and businesses only have minimal, if any, access to broadband now. This truly is a game-changer. It levels the playing field for rural Ontario and allows us to compete with anybody else around the world, especially in an area like Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

It allows people to remain at home if they want. Our brightest, our new young folks like our pages sitting in front of you, can have that option to stay at home if they choose, rather than having to move for jobs. That continues proud family traditions. People can move to our area. Many people want out of the city in their later years; they want to come to a beautiful place like Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. Businesses can thrive and grow, and again, expand and move to our area because of this game-changing technology.

People want to come to an area like ours because of the beauty, the quality of life, the lower cost for taxes, for real estate. Setting up a business is much simpler, in many cases, and easier in some of our areas than being in a large urban area where there's lots of competition. The sustainability of our communities is also going to be impacted, because, again, you'll have more business, you'll have more individuals who want to stay there. It allows individuals, as well, to stay connected to the world around them.

I was pleased to see, yesterday, actually, money in the budget for some things in rural Ontario. I'm glad to see that. It took a long time, more time than I would have liked, but I do appreciate it. The SouthWestern Integrated Fibre Technology Inc. group, SWIFT, has been giving prominence to this issue from the perspective that it was an infrastructure gap. I want to commend them, especially Geoff Hogan, for their leadership in fighting to close the broadband divide.

I also want to commend my colleague and MPP for Wellington–Halton Hills, Ted Arnott, for putting this issue on the Legislature's agenda. Back on July 3, 2014, in private member's notice of motion number 3, Mr. Arnott said, "That, in the opinion of this House, the government should develop a strategy to ensure that all Ontarians have access to affordable, reliable, high-speed Internet; and work collaboratively with the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus and the federal government to achieve this goal through the development of public/private partnerships." He was way ahead of the game, and I'm glad to see the government listen.

On July 27, 2016, he issued a news release where, again, he said, "Access to reliable and affordable high-speed Internet is essential in today's economy," Mr.

Arnott argued. 'It would help our local businesses grow and attract new investment in our rural communities.'" Kudos to him for doing that.

I do want to say that one thing I didn't see in this bill or in the budget was natural gas. That, again, is a huge thing for our area. I know that certainly the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and many municipalities have been pushing for it. So I hope that we'll be able to see that. Mr. Rinaldi has referenced infrastructure, so those types of things—roads, bridges—are very critical to rural Ontario.

I do want to point out that, sadly, there are a lot of things in rural Ontario that have not happened. I'm just going to highlight them. Our horse racing industry was decimated. They've driven jobs and industry out of our communities with high taxes and high hydro rates. They've closed 600 schools across the province, and a lot in rural Ontario. They've starved hospitals of investments. Yes, they brought some money to the table yesterday, but not as much as we would like to see.

They put in the Green Energy Act, which stripped local decision-making. These things are things that people have to understand. In northern Ontario, certainly, things like Ontario Northland have been cut back or removed altogether. These are continually things that are going to have impacts on rural Ontario.

I respect the member's efforts to do this. I just want to point out that I'm glad to see he is saying that rural Ontario is a priority. I hope the rest of his government does. It was good to see some money put in there—certainly not enough, because we are the lifeblood.

We need to work as both urban and rural residents of Ontario to make it the greatest province it can be.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted to have an opportunity to support my member for Northumberland—Quinte West on this important motion.

I know what people in the House are thinking: Why would a downtown Toronto guy be speaking on a rural motion? It maybe speaks—to the member who just spoke—about the importance that all of us on this side of the House believe in: the importance that rural Ontario plays in our province.

All the members so far have very significant rural components to the ridings they represent. Of course, the history of Beaches—East York—we used to be the breadbasket for Toronto. We used to be the vegetable gardens for the city of Toronto. In fact, the very first pasteurized milk came out of Beaches—East York in the Massey lands, just at Dawes Road and Danforth. We have a rural tradition, a historical tradition, from when the riding of York East was a much bigger area.

I just took a look at the history. In 1851, when statistics were first kept on this fact, 13% of people lived in cities in the country of Canada—the pre-country of Canada, in 1851—and 87% were rural. Then, at the turn of the 1900s, 37% of people lived in cities, and 63% still

lived in rural Ontario. Well, now that's all changed. In 2001, 80% of people were living in what we would describe as urban areas and not rural areas, and some 20% were rural.

So we have seen a huge migration of people from the country into the cities. Nothing would make me happier, as a city dweller, than to start to reverse some of that. In order to reverse it, Speaker, we're just going to have to provide the kinds of services in rural Ontario so that people in cities will go.

Our cities are jam-packed with people. Our roads are clogged, and our subways are cramped. It's hard to find housing. It's expensive housing because the demand is so high, compared to the supply. So we want to push as many people as we can, as fast we can, back into the country. But how are we going to get millennials to go out to the country if they can't be streaming Netflix and CraveTV on high-speed, fiber-optic Internet? As a base, it is absolutely important we get that right.

I know that in my community, as we have newcomers—from Bangladesh, for instance—who are all farmers and agricultural, they want to be on the Internet so that they can get their hands dirty. I look forward to helping them do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Northumberland—Quinte West to wrap up.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I really appreciate the comments, and I'm just going to highlight a couple of them. First of all, let me say thank you to all of them for supporting. I think they're all going to support the motion, which is great.

The comments from the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane: You are right. There are only a very few of us here that can scream loudly for rural Ontario. We have to join forces to be able to do that. I'm delighted that you made that comment; it resonates really well.

To the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry: I'm not sure I understood him right, but I was a bit confused, because I think that when he was part of the wardens' caucus in eastern Ontario, the eastern Ontario wardens asked for \$55 million from each of the federal and provincial, and then they ran with the money to deliver the best product they could. Government wasn't there to put the wires or the antennas up; it was the eastern Ontario wardens, and they got exactly what they wanted. So I'm disappointed to hear that if he was there, he missed that part of the conversation.

To my good friend from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, who I have a lot of respect for, I would say that he ended his—I was really pleased with his comments, I should say, and I think they were dead-on. But at the end of the day he says, "Not enough money." Well, this is where I get a little political when we're not supposed to, but I think I heard him or one of his colleagues say, "We need to cut. We need to cut." We can't have it both ways.

But anyway, I really appreciate the comments, and the comments of all my other colleagues as well. Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will vote on this item at the end of private members' public business.

1520

FEE WAIVERS (PHOTO CARD
AND BIRTH CERTIFICATE) ACT, 2018
LOI DE 2018 SUR LA DISPENSE DE DROITS
(CARTES-PHOTO ET CERTIFICATS
DE NAISSANCE)

Ms. Kiwala moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 26, An Act to amend the Photo Card Act, 2008 and the Vital Statistics Act with respect to fee waivers for photo cards and birth certificates / *Projet de loi 26, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2008 sur les cartes-photo et la Loi sur les statistiques de l'état civil en ce qui concerne la dispense de droits applicables à l'obtention d'une carte-photo et d'un certificat de naissance.*

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I am proud today to rise for the debate of my private member's bill, Bill 26, Fee Waivers Act.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the tremendous efforts of Karla McGrath, the director of Queen's Family Law Clinic. Among those who know her, Karla is a problem-solver, and her dedication to this private member's bill idea is no different. She rallied the support of her students, including Olga Michtchouk, who also played a critical role in the development of this PMB. Thank you, both of you, for your dedication, your hard work and, quite literally, your relentless enthusiasm.

This bill was inspired by a group of Queen's law students and faculty in collaboration with the Pro Bono Students Canada, or PBSC. PBSC is a national, award-winning program that operates across Canada, with chapters at all eight law schools in Ontario.

Today we are joined by Carolina Cuevas, Nikki Gersh bain, Alison Symington, Caroline Tarjan, Amy Willis and Daniel Simonian.

Also, I would like to thank Judy McGrath, Oskar McCarson and Sydney-Jane McCarson for being here today.

As always, I would like to express my utmost gratitude to my EA, Anna Majetic, who is also joining us in the gallery; Jagtaran Singh, the legislative counsel; and staff from the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services for all of your input and support.

I would also like to thank our Attorney General, Yasir Naqvi, for his visits to Kingston and his encouragement to the Queen's legal aid students to get involved in solving a societal problem.

That's one of the great things about this bill: It's very constituent-based. It very much reflects the work of a dedicated group of individuals in my riding of Kingston and the Islands who are interested in making a positive

impact in the world, making this world a better place for all.

I'd like to encourage everyone to pause for a moment and reflect on all of the daily activities in which we require a piece of government-issued ID. This is something many people tend not to think about and probably take for granted. Among other activities, government-issued ID is necessary for driving, getting a bank account, buying a house and travelling beyond our borders. ID is also among the documents that are required to obtain a name change or a marriage licence.

You will need it to apply to college or go to the library. If you're homeless or between housing and living in a shelter, you will need that ID card to access the Internet, perhaps at a library, to keep in touch with family or update a service provider online. How many times have we heard in this House "access it online"? This is something that is a problem if you have no ID and cannot use library services.

You may also need ID to enter government buildings, like this one, in fact, that we are here in today. It is a little bit ironic that if you did not have ID, you would not be able to take part in this conversation.

Bill 26 seeks to enhance access to photo cards and birth certificates in the province for marginalized and vulnerable individuals. The bill, if passed, would amend the Photo Card Act, 2008, to provide fee waivers for individuals who cannot afford to pay the fees required for photo cards. The bill would also amend the Vital Statistics Act to include fee waivers for individuals who cannot afford to pay the fees required for birth certificates.

There are varying amounts attached to getting government-issued ID replaced. For example, an Ontario birth certificate or an Ontario photo ID can cost \$35.

An individual who is seeking a new health card or driver's licence will need to present other forms of identification in order to get it. An Ontario ID card, driver's licence and birth certificate are on the list of acceptable pieces of documentation. By waiving fees associated with replacing ID cards, this bill will serve to enhance access to all pieces of identification for vulnerable individuals in communities all across this province.

There are precedents for this solution. In 2003, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice, Divisional Court, ruled that failure to waive Small Claims Court fees for vulnerable individuals with a demonstrated inability to pay, and who also had meritorious cases for a fee waiver, violated both the common law of access to court and the rule of law. The Ontario Court of Appeal, the Federal Court and other provincial courts followed suit. Critically, these legal precedents recognized the right of reasonable access to justice. Bill 26 builds a similar case.

Other precedents include name changes for residential school survivors as part of Ontario's acknowledgment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Landlord and Tenant Board can also waive fees for an applicant seeking to launch a claim.

An important question is precisely how one would go about defining cases where an individual cannot afford to

pay. From a technical standpoint, waivers may potentially apply to individuals living below the poverty line. However, it is important that we continue to listen to and engage with service providers that have on-the-ground experience. They play a critical role in advocating on behalf of those who are in crisis or are faced with especially difficult circumstances. People like Chris McBride from the Street Health Centre in Kingston and all of his incredible colleagues at the Kingston Community Health Centres, who work tirelessly every single day and have seen numerous people in these precarious circumstances, will no doubt have a lighter load, should this bill pass.

Studies show that low-income members of the community are disproportionately susceptible to losing their government-issued identification or having it stolen. For example, street-involved people face the harsh reality of having their belongings stolen while they're sleeping.

In addition to the associated fees, replacing identification can be a very challenging and lengthy process. It can be problematic, for example, if health care is needed on an urgent basis.

There are often cases of domestic violence where the perpetrator will withhold the victim's wallet and identification as a tactic to lure that person back into the home or to force them to not leave in the first place. Victims of domestic violence are then obliged to weigh the costs of living without identification against the risk of harm to themselves and their children. Many choose to leave their IDs, and consequently their lives, behind.

There is a wonderful opportunity to collaborate with the federal government on this bill as well, as we do everything possible to ensure that inmates are released into our communities in the best possible circumstances. You need a birth certificate to get a SIN card. Without a SIN card, you cannot be employed. I would like to thank the representative from Corrections Canada in Kingston and the Islands who has reached out already to start that discussion.

Mr. Speaker, our office has received an outpouring of support from law students, legal professionals, social workers, legal clinics, women's shelters, numerous other service providers and concerned community members from across Ontario and Canada. Obtaining or replacing ID, and consequently being denied services, can be an especially stressful and challenging situation for all involved. While many service organizations throughout the province work to alleviate this financial barrier and stress, they are relying on portions of their own budgets or external donations to financially support clients who require identification, on a case-by-case basis. If this bill is passed, these organizations will not have to spend their resources in this way.

Currently, staff from these organizations spend their precious time trying to help clients who do not have identification get the services that they need.

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One such example is access to a bank account. Not having ID is very problematic for those who rely on the Ontario Disability Support Program. ODSP payments are

normally issued through direct deposit, and clients without access to a bank are in a precarious position. Staff do their best to ensure that clients receive the funds in a timely and efficient manner. There are countless other examples.

This past Monday, I sponsored a youth homelessness lobby day in partnership with the United Way. We had a fascinating discussion about upstream interventions. We also heard from youth advocates who survived homelessness and are now champions within this community.

A common issue facing the homeless is lost or stolen ID. This becomes very problematic, especially for those seeking jobs. We need to make sure that we do everything for our youth—and for everyone who is without ID—that we possibly can to alleviate this hardship.

By waiving the fees, Bill 26 can make a tremendous difference. It will help to ensure that youth do not have to face yet another obstacle.

This bill recognizes these challenging circumstances. It would not be possible, once again, without the help of the Queen's legal aid students and the staff who participated in advancing it, so I again want to thank you so much for that. I hope that it receives support today from all members in this House. It's very important that this bill passes.

Thank you, everyone.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: We're here debating a private member's bill put forward by the member from Kingston and the Islands, discussing fee waivers specifically for photo-card IDs and birth certificates. It's an important topic, and I'm glad we're discussing it. I don't remember, since I got elected four years ago, discussing anything similar to this. We're looking at the issue of the fact that there are people who cannot afford to get or to replace and renew birth certificates and other photo ID.

I did some research on it, and I found out that, actually, the government makes a profit. I think it's a little shocking that the government's current profit on vital statistics documents is over 50%. I think that would be outrageous to a lot of our constituents, to realize that they're paying income taxes, they're paying sales taxes, they're paying property taxes, they're paying gas taxes, and then they're paying to get ID and they're assuming that the cost is on a cost-replacement basis to get this ID and services. It leads them to wonder: "What other ID or licensing fees am I paying that are going towards general government coffers?"

What comes to mind is vehicle validation stickers. We've seen it more than double with this government, which has been in power almost 15 years. I looked at September 1, 2011, when it was \$74. It went up to \$82 in 2012, then to \$90, and now we're to the point where it has practically doubled to register a vehicle in southern Ontario.

At the time, the ministry was asked by some media, and the ministry said that the fee increases were needed to maintain highway infrastructure. Again, people are left

to wonder. We're hearing that we needed to sell Hydro One to pay for infrastructure. We're hearing that we need to pay taxes. Some people's taxes are going up with this budget. We're seeing higher costs for some businesses. They're not going to be exempt from paying the health premium tax that they have been exempt from paying for small businesses.

We have to wonder what spending is going to be cut if this comes into effect, because if the government budgeted, counting on this revenue—because that's what it is; it's revenue—what is the member proposing is going to be cut from the government's budget in order to allow for this?

As the critic for children, youth and families—we know that the child welfare social workers struggle every day with homeless youth who don't have ID, and children who come into protective custody whose parents refuse to hand over the ID. The social workers need to register the children for school and maybe take a child to a doctor, and they need to get this ID replaced. I'm not sure if it's waived right now for our children's aid societies and our workers, but that's certainly something to look at. I think it might cost more money to waive it for low-income earners, to examine whether or not people are low-income earners or can't afford to pay it, than to just make it free or half-price or a discount for everybody. Sometimes you spend more money trying to do the bureaucracy than if you just made it free for everybody. It might be cheaper than actually paying for that bureaucracy.

Unfortunately, if you need a long-form government death certificate, it's not free. You have to pay to get it. Being born is expensive, and dying isn't exactly cheap either, Madam Speaker.

We just had a leadership race on this side of the House, and we had 14-year-old members who had to show ID. They had to upload their ID online, and it had to be photo ID. We all found out that you're not allowed to use—I'd heard it before, but it hadn't really sunk in—your OHIP card for photo ID. A lot of 14-year-olds do not have photo ID with their address to upload. Until they get some kind of driver's licence or learner's permit, they don't have that type of ID.

I'm looking forward to hearing more debate on the topic. It's very interesting. I thank the member for bringing it forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure for me to rise, on behalf of the people I represent in London West, to participate in this debate on Bill 26, the private member's bill that was brought forward by the member from Kingston and the Islands.

I want to say at the outset that the member from Kingston and the Islands is someone for whom I have enormous respect, and I really appreciate her initiative in bringing this bill forward.

Certainly, for all of the reasons that she set out in her remarks, these changes that are set out in this bill could

make a huge difference in the lives of low-income Ontarians; in the lives of people who experience homelessness; in the lives of women and their children who are living in violent situations and who are seeking a safe place to stay; and, in particular, in the lives of persons with disabilities. This is an important initiative. I appreciate her call for all members to join in supporting this bill.

I also have to say, however, Speaker, that I am disappointed that these changes weren't included in the budget that was presented in this Legislature yesterday. This is a change that could have not only been supported by all members of this Legislature but actually implemented through that budget, if this government gets re-elected—which is a big “if.” Regardless, it would have been nice to see these changes included in the budget yesterday.

In my community, in London, we are experiencing very, very high levels of poverty. Back in 2015, our city council undertook an initiative, led by the mayor, to conduct a review of initiatives that could be implemented to reduce poverty in our community. As part of that initiative, it was identified that there are many populations in London that are at much higher risk of living in poverty—lone-parent families, particularly those led by women. Certainly, the change that's set out in this legislation to allow birth certificates to be attained without cost would be significant for those lone-parent families. We know that persons with disabilities are also at much higher incidence of low income than other people in my community of London, but also across the province and across Canada. Persons with disabilities can have low-income rates as high as 46%, which is significantly higher than persons without disabilities.

The statistics that were gathered during the mayor's initiative, the Mayor's Advisory Panel on Poverty, were confirmed when Statistics Canada released the results of the last census in the fall, and it showed that London has the second-highest rate of child poverty in all big cities in Ontario—third highest in Canada; second highest in Ontario. So this bill would make a difference in my community.

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I did want to, however, raise an issue that, if this bill moves forward, I would like to see incorporated in this bill.

I have a constituent from London West whose name is Robert Illingworth, and I would like to thank him for the advocacy that he has engaged in with regard to the Ontario photo card. He has a child who has a serious disability, and he points out that people who need an Ontario photo card for their identification, unlike a driver's licence, are required to go to ServiceOntario and get a new photograph every five years. If you have a driver's licence, you are only required to update your photograph every 10 years.

You can imagine, Speaker, that for a person with a severe disability, in particular a mobility disability, to get out to ServiceOntario every five years imposes a significant barrier. So he has been advocating with the Ministry

of Transportation to get this change made. He has been told that the ministry is currently undertaking a review of policies relating to the Ontario photo card and would include his recommendations as part of their review.

But I certainly believe that for persons with disabilities, the barriers to obtaining an Ontario photo card go further than just the cost of the card. In this case, it is very difficult to get to a ServiceOntario location. We know there are many communities across this province that don't have easy access to a ServiceOntario location, so to go every five years to renew a card can create significant barriers.

I have to say that there was a potential solution that was suggested to Mr. Illingworth by the Ministry of Transportation: that he could send a power of attorney to a ServiceOntario office, on behalf of his daughter, who could obtain the updated Ontario photo card. This is not a tenable solution. For this parent, Mr. Illingworth, to make arrangements with a power of attorney to send that person to a ServiceOntario office with a photograph of the daughter so that she can get her updated photo card is simply not feasible for this family.

I would encourage the member, if this bill passes—and hopefully, it will go to committee. I know we don't have a lot of time left in this legislative session, but if it is brought to the top of the list at the committee input stage, I would strongly urge, with issues around obtaining photo updates for Ontario photo cards, that moving that to a 10-year cycle rather than a five-year cycle would be very, very important for persons with disabilities like the daughter of my constituent Robert Illingworth.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Arthur Potts: It is once again a delight to be able, during private members' business, to stand in support of my colleague from Kingston and the Islands on this very important bill.

What makes it particularly satisfying for me is the way in which this bill has come about. I think it's the hallmark of an extremely good, an excellent MPP that they're in their community, that they're listening to their community, that they're hearing what they're saying, that they're understanding what they're saying and then they're acting on what they're saying. I think that's exactly how we see the process of this bill and how it has come forward. I'm very thrilled that they're so well represented in Kingston and the Islands, and that their member takes this kind of initiative.

It's kind of how I've responded in my community. I had a similar situation with daycare wait-list fees, where lawyers in my community who were starting out in the profession couldn't find daycare and had to put money down on a wait-list. They came to me, and in the course of that whole process, they were recording the whole process to figure out how a bill gets made. It was a learning experience for lawyers in my community to watch how a private member's bill can go on and become law. I've been very successful with so many of my private member's bills so far by taking that approach of listening and

then acting, with the understanding of what needed to be done and, typically, with unanimous support in this House on all my bills that have come forward. So I'm delighted.

This is going to be very helpful in my community as well. We have a group, the Neighbourhood Group, which represents people who are living precariously in my community. It's run by a woman named Elizabeth Forestell, the president and CEO. It's actually a larger group across the city of Toronto, and it rose out of a group called the Central Neighbourhood House. I mention that because my father was on the board of directors of Central Neighbourhood House when I was a young lad, and used to bring me down. It was my first exposure to people who needed additional supports in their lives. What an incredible organization that was.

They have a program, and it's called PAID, curiously enough. It stands for Partners for Access and ID. It's such an important role that they play in the community. Last year alone, they did over 7,000 ID assists for communities. They receive provincial funding in order to provide that, which is, in a way, a fee waiver, in that they receive the money from the provincial government and the provincial government is able to pay for the thing. It's an important process. They have six full-time workers working on these kinds of ID searches. It's extraordinarily important.

We also have WoodGreen Community Services. Like I said, they also operate within my riding. They do a whole series of identity searches. We see it on a regular basis in our office. I know that my staff works very closely with Neighbourhood Group as well as WoodGreen in order to assist people moving forward on this.

My concern would be—and it was a concern that was raised by the member from Thornhill—issues about fee waivers for people who cannot afford to pay. The income-testing doesn't speak to the universality of all the programs that we try to bring here. Just recently, in our budget, we've extended daycare in a universal way, and we've extended dental care with the Ontario dental and drug benefit plan in a universal way, where we're not income-testing, because these are basic.

You do get concerned that if the cost associated with doing income-testing—and not just the cost, but the embarrassment, when someone comes in and you have to go through a process to find out whether they can afford the fee or not afford the fee. I don't think we should be subjecting people to that kind of subjective test. It should be a very quick waiver. Make it automatic and let them decide, just with checking off a box, that they want the fee waived. It's the same kind of issue we have with kids in schools: Can they afford to pay for that trip? You want to be very, very careful that we don't stigmatize people having to ask for it to be free.

We also know that the fee isn't the only cost. Some of the issues are so incredibly complex. I have a constituent who, for instance, doesn't remember where she was born, and doesn't have the ID to show. She needs a birth certificate and whatever to get her ID in place in order to get jobs, services and programs in the province.

So I'm delighted with the bill and happy to support it. Congratulations.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate.

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I'm proud to rise on behalf of my constituents of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry to talk to this bill.

Over the life of this government, we have seen taxes collected more than double, and far too many of these fees collected are more than it costs to recover the cost of providing the service. A recent study shows that more than 50% of the cost of these services is not required to pay for the actual service itself. So I get a little concerned when I hear—I know that we have people in the community who need help, but we can't overcharge everybody for something just because we can.

We have an Auditor General's report that came out talking about Drive Clean and showing that most of that fee was actually a tax, and in essence, I guess, illegal—to be charging more, unless you are going to call it a tax and not a fee.

I remember when, during the last election campaign, the member from Leeds-Grenville came down. He had a scroll of the tax and fee increases up to 2011. When he rolled that out, it went out into the street; I mean, this was a huge roll.

So it's interesting and nice to hear the member from Beaches-East York saying that it's great that people are listening to their constituents, because I don't think any of my constituents are talking about how they're happy to be paying all these extra fees and costs. I hear that all the time: Taxes—everything—have gone up, but we aren't seeing the services go up.

If you are sitting there and you happen to be somebody who's retired on a fixed income, or somebody on a low income, who's seeing \$2-, \$3- or \$4-a-month increases in retirement, it's hard to be paying for some of these huge increases.

We've seen a government attack some of our services, some of the church suppers. Originally, when they came, they tried to close those down. For many people, that's the only square meal they get. It's a great service, and it actually keeps some of these institutions open. It was only the huge backlash that finally made them turn that back. Of course, the farmers' markets were, at the same time, something that they tried to close down.

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Speaker, it just goes to show that when we're looking at how we're providing government, we don't always have to just raise taxes.

This morning, the Minister of Finance commented that these efficiencies were actually cuts and they were approaching, over the next four years, about \$14 billion, but he wouldn't specify where they were.

In my riding, I know they were looking at closing the Morrisburg ServiceOntario office, along with a number across the province. They don't know if that's one of the services they're looking at. People in North Dundas have to spend an hour driving to get basic ID services because

they don't allow them at the chamber of commerce. The Winchester offices are being closed. People have to drive to Cornwall. Many people don't have cars or transportation. There's no public transportation.

Life is getting a lot harder in rural Ontario. Every time you turn around, it's either another tax or another fee or a greater distance you have to drive because of the closures by this government.

So we certainly support this. I think that we should be looking at fees for all people. We have to at least bring them down to costs, if not more.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Madam Speaker, I want to lend my support to this particular motion, and I want to point out that, for a certain place in northern Ontario and probably in some other places in southern Ontario, this is a big issue.

As you know, I represent the riding of Timmins-James Bay. The James Bay is an isolated, no-road-access area in northern Ontario. In the communities there, there's not a lot of work; there are not a lot of jobs. If you're lucky enough to get a job at De Beers at the Victor mine or can work for the band office or one of the agencies on-reserve, you're doing pretty well. Unfortunately, there are not enough of those jobs to go around. The unemployment rate in our communities is quite high. As a result, you've got a greater reliance on ODSP and a greater reliance on Ontario Works in communities like Attawapiskat or Kashechewan or others than you would have in other communities. That's not because of any reason other than they're in isolated areas that have a very low prospect of getting work.

The thing that surprised me the most when I first started representing the James Bay is, first of all, most people did not have any identification cards. Most citizens who live in that part of the world didn't even have a status card, let alone a health card or a birth certificate or a social insurance number. The way that I found out about that was, when I was dealing with the hospital, the hospital had what they called a non-insured health program that allowed people to be flown out from places like Attawapiskat to the hospital in Kingston, because the hospital in Kingston was the parent hospital to the hospital in Moose Factory, Weeneebayko. Unfortunately, the funding that the hospital got was based on how many members resided in the community who were status Indians. Well, there were a number of them who didn't count because they didn't have status cards. Why? Because they didn't have birth certificates, they didn't have health cards, they didn't have social insurance numbers—they had none of that because they were not registered at birth. Why? Because families couldn't afford to pay the fee that was associated with registering the child when the child was born.

If Mom goes into labour and goes to the hospital, let's say, in Attawapiskat or the health clinic in Kashechewan, and has the child—maybe in the community, but more times than not, she's airlifted to Moose Factory to have

the baby at the hospital in Moose Factory, at Weeneebayko. So Mom is there. She has four or five kids back home in Attawapiskat. She doesn't have a lot of money, because they happen to be unemployed. They give her the forms and they say, "Register your newborn child." Mom doesn't have the money to pay all of the various fees that are associated with getting a birth certificate, with getting a health card, with getting a SIN number, with getting all those things. Mom goes back to Attawapiskat, and guess what? You get to Attawapiskat and there's nowhere to register, because there is no ServiceOntario in those communities. It's essentially a non-existing service.

Our office started, some years ago, going up to do clinics until we were able to finally get ServiceOntario to start providing services in those communities. ServiceOntario now goes up about three times, four times a year in order to register people.

But the amount of kids and of young adults who were not registered, as a result of not having the fee to be able to pay the registration, caused all kinds of difficulty, everything from the child grows up, doesn't have any identification, is trying to get a job somewhere and doesn't have a SIN number, or is applying for funding through the band office in order to be able to continue their education, and they have a band number but they don't have a status because they don't have a status card, because they don't have all the other information.

If this particular motion is actually able to support the idea that, first of all, all children should be registered at birth; it should be done at the location where the child is born; and it shouldn't be the fee that stops the parent from being able to say, "Yes, I will register my child," I can tell you that will go a long way in communities from Pikangikum to Kashechewan to every other point in between and around, because there are all kinds of children who never got a chance to be registered.

I wish I had more time, because I have a wonderful story to tell about a birth certificate clinic where people who were born in what's called "the bush" cannot be registered because it's not a town. But they actually were born in the bush, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you for this opportunity to speak on the bill proposed by the member from Kingston and the Islands. I want to commend my colleague—my seatmate—for putting forward this important piece of legislation here today.

Bill 26, the Fee Waivers Act, if passed, would amend the Photo Card Act, 2008, to provide for fee waivers for individuals who cannot afford to pay the fees required for photo cards. The bill would also amend the Vital Statistics Act to include fee waivers for individuals who cannot afford to pay the fees required for birth certificates.

I've had a number of individuals come into my office over the last number of years to receive help with getting photo IDs. The majority of them are either seniors who are on a fixed income, or they are persons with

disabilities who are currently receiving social assistance. The proposed bill may seem like a small change that affects only a few people, but the impacts are enormous for the people living on a fixed income in my community of Davenport.

Removing fees for identification cards for individuals who cannot afford to pay would directly help the most vulnerable individuals in our communities across Ontario. I have received a number of letters from advocates in my community praising the proposed changes, and I'm very proud to add my support for Bill 26.

It has been shown that low-income individuals are particularly susceptible to having their ID lost or stolen and going through the financial burden of having their identification replaced numerous times, which can be very distressful and a very difficult experience for these individuals. It is notable that a replacement birth certificate and an Ontario photo ID card each cost \$35, and that frequently individuals will require one in order to obtain the other. This is important, because obtaining government identification is often one step toward accessing a number of other services that help people lift themselves out of poverty. Being without identification significantly impacts a person's ability to access essential services such as housing and income support.

In order to open a bank account, banks require government-issued ID. If two pieces of identification cannot be presented, the bank may request a birth certificate, a utility bill, a T4 slip or a credit card statement. However, if an individual does not even have the basic ID, it is unlikely that they will be able to present any of these.

For a person who relies on the Ontario Disability Support Program, if they cannot access their bank account because they don't have the necessary ID, they cannot access the support payments they are entitled to. This means that someone who cannot afford to pay for government ID may be further locked out of accessing their government-funded income support services.

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The irony of the situation, Madam Speaker, is telling, and highlights why passage of this bill is so crucial. Circumstances like these cannot fall to the wayside of our public consciousness, because the people who are directly impacted by this bill are individuals who currently may have to choose between paying for identification or rent. I'm happy to support a bill which addresses those people's needs.

In many cases, service providers and charities have taken upon themselves the responsibility of making government IDs financially accessible to those who cannot afford them, but they do it at their own discretion and out of their own budgets or through private donations. While I am grateful to the many organizations in my riding of Davenport for the great work that they do on this front, this solution is unsustainable and widely inconsistent across different service providers. Bill 26 would standardize this fee-waiving service, making access to government services more equitable and fair for everyone in our community.

Madam Speaker, legislation like this shows a government taking action, one that is attuned and responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable members of our communities. That is why I am proud to support Bill 26, the Fee Waivers Act.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Once again, it's a pleasure to rise in this hallowed House and contribute to the debate that we have before us on private members' business, in this case to speak to the member from Kingston and the Islands' legislation that has been brought forward. I am very confident that it is brought forward with the best of intentions and with the utmost regard for those in her community, as well, who may not have equitable access to some of these forms of identification.

It's an important piece of legislation, Madam Speaker. I think it really is, and I want to commend the member for it, because I think it's something that, unfortunately, Ontarians have not really seen too much of from the government. It's a piece of legislation that actually seeks to reduce fees and taxes, which I think is a welcome surprise for Ontarians who have felt the slowly increasing, strangling hold of fees and taxes around their necks over the past 15 years. I think the member has taken a commendable step towards looking at how we can make life more affordable, especially for those on the margins and those vulnerable populations who might not be able to access government services, particularly these forms of identification, as easily as some of us may be able to access them.

Others in this House have spoken at some length about some of those situations that came up. I must confess that I was intrigued by the comments from the member for Timmins–James Bay. I look forward to hearing the story of those who are born in the bush at some later date, but I can imagine, coming from rural Ontario myself—I think I know where he was going with that. For those who might not have a fixed address, it's therefore difficult to put down a home address in this situation.

I want to just point out a couple of quick statistics. Again, thank you to the member for Kingston and the Islands for coming forward with this, but the reality is that the Liberal government as a whole has a pretty dismal record when it comes to fees and tax increases. If you look at the government's current profit on vital statistics documents, it's over 50%. That means that over 50% of the cost of providing these vital statistics documents goes into general coffers, as opposed to what these fees are really meant for, which is helping to provide vital statistics documents that are essential for our functioning in society.

It's really not a choice to have these documents; it's a necessity, as the member for Davenport talked about. It's next to impossible to rent a house, open a bank account or make any of those steps that functioning and productive members of society wish to make. So I think it's important that we look at some of the current profits on vital statistics documents and see what we can do to

reduce those fees across the board. Obviously, the Financial Accountability Officer has already highlighted that the Ontario government makes money on birth certificates and other vital statistics documents, and this is really contrary to the spirit of the legislation enabling the charging of such fees.

Madam Speaker, I think it's fair to say that Ontarians have seen death by a thousand cuts when it comes to the increases of fees in just about every area of life, whether it's from licence plate fees that have slowly crept over the years or camping fees which go up a little bit by a little bit. Hunting and fishing licence fees—I know these are more luxury services that Ontarians have come to expect, but still, I think the member has taken a good, hard look at the danger of increasing fees on such forms of identification, and I think that in this case, she should be commended for that. I look forward to supporting this legislation when it comes to a vote later this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Harinder Malhi: I'm pleased to stand up to speak to the Fee Waivers Act. I want to thank my colleague for bringing this important piece of legislation forward.

Speaker, if passed, the bill would amend the Photo Card Act, 2008, and provide fee waivers for individuals who cannot afford to pay the associated costs of replacing photo identification. The bill would also amend the Vital Statistics Act to include fee waivers for individuals who cannot afford the cost of foundational documents like birth certificates.

As the Minister of the Status of Women, I support this bill. It's critical that women of all income levels have access to the resources they need. It is clear that this bill will have a significant impact on women and children fleeing violence. As we know, women and children are at greater risk of violence, and this could have a lasting effect on their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

This bill will ensure that those who cannot afford to pay the fees associated with essential identification documents will not face additional challenges to obtaining or replacing them. We know that this is an important topic because of the intersectional issues faced by the most vulnerable people in our society. For example, women fleeing domestic violence often need additional supports that go beyond counselling, clothing, food and a safe place to stay. Women fleeing violence don't always have the time to locate and pack items like identification or birth certificates for themselves or their children.

Without critical documents like photo ID, women face barriers to accessing health care, counselling services, housing, employment and even basic banking. Some abusers withhold identification cards as a tool to control their victims. Survivors of domestic violence have to consider the risk of trying to get these documents back from their abusers, often putting their own safety and the safety of their children at risk. Without the options that identification cards provide, survivors could be in a repetitive cycle of violence with their abusers.

Similarly, survivors of human trafficking face uncertainty when trying to escape their traffickers, many of whom threaten their lives or the lives of their families. When survivors of human trafficking escape their traffickers, it can be a very dangerous situation. Having access to photo ID is a very important first step to rebuilding their lives and healing.

We know that indigenous women, racialized women and women with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ community are often at even greater risk of facing violence.

Our government believes in building a province in which services are accessible to everyone, including the most vulnerable people in our society. That's why, just yesterday, we announced our budget, entitled Care and Opportunity. Speaker, that is what we strive for as a government: to ensure there is care and opportunity for Ontarians when and where they need it.

We recently announced It's Never Okay, Ontario's Gender-Based Violence Strategy, with an investment of up to \$242 million. Every woman in this province deserves to have access to essential documents, and this bill will support those women in the most critical times of their lives.

I am looking forward to supporting this legislation today. I know it will help many, many vulnerable people in our communities.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I will return to the member from Kingston and the Islands to wrap up.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: It is a pleasure to hear the debate today. I would like to thank the members from Thornhill, London West, Beaches–East York, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Timmins–James Bay, Davenport and Niagara West–Glanbrook, and the Minister of the Status of Women. It has been a very interesting discussion.

This bill was created to help those who are really our most vulnerable in all of our communities across the province. It should be a non-partisan subject. I wasn't really expecting to hear much about Drive Clean and camping fees. We're just talking about identity cards—birth certificates, photo IDs—so that people can access services.

I would also like to say to the member from London West how much I reciprocate your feelings of respect. You have an absolutely fabulous ability to connect with your community, and you always bring that forward each and every time you speak in this House. You've got a story; you know the issues. I thank you for being right on the edge of this discussion.

It is critical as well, as the member from Timmins–James Bay said—you very eloquently pointed out the quagmire that people fall into when they don't have ID and they can't get one service without another, as did the member of Davenport.

I think that all members in the House, regardless of party, cannot argue with the necessity for the bill in order to help people advance in their lives.

I thank you, and I hope I have your support.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

TAXATION

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will deal first with ballot item number 4, standing in the name of Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Barrett has moved private member's notice of motion number 28.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear a no.

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

I believe the nays have it.

We will vote on this item at the end of the voting.

RURAL ONTARIO

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Rinaldi has moved private member's notice of motion number 27.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear "carried."

Congratulations.

Motion agreed to.

FEE WAIVERS (PHOTO CARD AND BIRTH CERTIFICATE) ACT, 2018

LOI DE 2018 SUR LA DISPENSE DE DROITS (CARTES-PHOTO ET CERTIFICATS DE NAISSANCE)

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Ms. Kiwala has moved second reading of Bill 26, An Act to amend the Photo Card Act, 2008 and the Vital Statistics Act with respect to fee waivers for photo cards and birth certificates.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear "carried."

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to turn to the member to ask which committee the member wants to refer the bill to.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Regulations and private bills, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Agreed? I hear "agreed." Congratulations.

Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell for the vote.

The division bells rang from 1612 to 1617.

TAXATION

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Barrett has moved private member's notice of motion number

28. All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Barrett, Toby	Martow, Gila	Oosterhoff, Sam
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	McDonnell, Jim	Walker, Bill
Coe, Lorne	Miller, Norm	

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	McMahon, Eleanor
Bisson, Gilles	Hunter, Mitzie	Moridi, Reza
Chan, Michael	Kiwala, Sophie	Potts, Arthur
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Coteau, Michael	Malhi, Harinder	Sattler, Peggy
Damerla, Dipika	Mangat, Amrit	Tabuns, Peter
Dhillon, Vic	Martins, Cristina	Vanthof, John
Dong, Han	Matthews, Deborah	Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 8; the nays are 24.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negated.

VISITOR

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I would like to recognize the daughter of our good friend from Peterborough. Shanae Leal is in the members' gallery. Shanae, welcome to Queen's Park.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PAY TRANSPARENCY ACT, 2018

LOI DE 2018

SUR LA TRANSPARENCE SALARIALE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 28, 2018, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 3, An Act respecting transparency of pay in employment / Projet de loi 3, Loi portant sur la transparence salariale.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? I recognize the member for Toronto—Danforth.

Interjection: Make it short.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the encouraging comments from the other side of the chamber.

1620

The Liberal government has had 15 years to tackle the gender pay gap in this province. Frankly, if had been a priority for the Liberals, then I'm sure that 14 years ago, 13 years ago, 10 years ago, eight years ago, five years

ago this would have been before us. But apparently it is not a priority.

It's interesting; it reminds me of the budget that came down yesterday in that we're dealing with a government for which the time is slowly running out, for which the future doesn't hold very many bright prospects, but a government, nonetheless, that is desperate to cling to power, willing to bring forward this bill, a very anemic version of what is required. But also a government that is willing, in its budget documents, to talk about investing in health care, when, in fact, we have had a situation now for more than a decade of underfunding in the health care system, such that we are developing a crisis in our hospital rooms. We have a government that has not invested in elementary and secondary education. As our critic from London West is well aware, we face a situation where our schools are crumbling and where there is constant inattention to the needs of our students.

This bill before us needs to be understood in the context of a government that really looked after itself for 15 years, and now, on it's deathbed, is having an epiphany that, in fact, its ongoing list of sins may result in it being turfed out. I don't say with certainty that they will be turfed out because in the end the voters decide. But right now, I'd say if you're looking at storms on the horizon, there is a big storm a-coming.

This bill is not going to do what's needed to improve the pay equity outlook for women in Ontario. The proposed legislation does not even match current obligations under the Ontario Pay Equity Act or any planned federal legislation that we've been hearing about, both of which apply to both private and public sector employers with 10 employees or more. That's pretty extraordinary, that with 15 years on the clock, with full knowledge of the unjust, unfair situation in our province with regard to women's income, that at the last moment, hoping for a reprieve, the government brings forward a bill that is, what can I say, drained of its essence, drained of vitality, drained of the energy really needed to deal with this issue.

This bill applies to the public sector, first off. In 15 years, the Liberals have not even been able to ensure pay equity within the government. It isn't as though they were without power to do this. For most of these 15 years, they have been in a majority situation. In the minority situation, they would have had the support in the House for aggressive and substantial action to deal with pay equity. But they didn't take that opportunity.

What has happened is that the Wynne government has refused to restore funding to the Pay Equity Commission, whose job it is to enforce pay equity compliance. The Pay Equity Commission had its funding cut in half in 1997 by the last Conservative government. This government, with all its verbal commitments to fairness, equity and an end to discrimination, didn't restore the funding to allow that commission to do the work that needed to be done. That's extraordinary.

Now, at this last moment, to say, "Ah, we're going to deal with this issue. It's a big priority for us"—it's a big priority for them like the health care crisis, the hospital

crisis. It's a priority for them like crumbling schools are a priority. It's a priority for them like desperation around lack of affordable child care. It's not a priority until their ox is about to be gored, and then suddenly it's important.

This bill says the reporting requirements contained in the proposed reforms will be applied to specific sectors. First they will be rolled out to the Ontario public service. Now, Speaker, as you're well aware, this is a service that this government has controlled for a decade and a half. If there are pay inequities, and I'm sure there are, they could have addressed them. However, 15 years on, they're going to bring in this Pay Transparency Act and start addressing things in the Ontario public service. And then, subsequently, these regulations, these requirements, will be introduced for private sector workplaces with more than 500 employees, and then those with more than 250.

What's interesting—and you wouldn't have picked it up from reading the legislation; I understand one would pick it up from the media release that came out when the bill was brought forward—is that there will be a consultation period between the time it's rolled out to the Ontario public service and the time it's rolled out to private sector employers with more than 500 employees, and then another consultation period before it's rolled out to the next tier, at 250 employees. There's no limit on that time, Speaker. That consultation period could be a day—a rather hurried consultation, in my opinion. It could be a few months. I'm not sure you actually need that consultation, but it could be a few months. It could be years. It could be decades. It could be forever.

When you have a bill that is so vague about when this will actually apply to the bulk of employers in the province, you have to ask, even beyond the anemic nature of the bill itself, how serious this government really is about pay equity. Really, how serious is it?

One of the good things: It prohibits employers from seeking compensation history from applicants. I don't have any argument with that. It should have been in place a long time ago. It should have been in place—and I'll give the government the benefit of the doubt—14 years ago, a year after they were first in government.

It requires employers who publicly advertise jobs to disclose the expected compensation or range: again, Speaker, not a bad idea. It's a good idea, and something, if this government were serious, they could have introduced a year into their first mandate. But it's 15 years later. An election is looming. The end of Liberal rule is looming.

The bill requires prescribed employers to regularly provide reporting on gender-related workforce composition and compensation differences in the workforce, and regularly submit them to the Ministry of Labour and post them online and in workplace: again, not a bad idea—very late in the day, but not a bad idea.

It prohibits reprisals against employees who inquire about, discuss or disclose compensation or reporting obligations set out in the act. I think that's a good idea. I have to tell you, back in the 1970s, I was working in an

insurance company in downtown Toronto. I was in touch with a number of friends working in other insurance companies, and we hooked up with the Canadian Labour Congress, which was engaged in organizing white collar workers. One of the things that was extraordinary to me in the insurance company that I worked in was that no one was able to tell anyone else how much they made. It was a mystery. It was a taboo. You could never say what you were getting, and there was, without doubt, a very severe penalty that would be visited on your head if you should leak to someone that you were making 60 bucks a week or 65 bucks a week.

In the course of doing that union organizing at North American Life Insurance, we happened to get pay comparisons with unionized office workers, unionized white collar workers, and it just blew the socks off the people working at North American Life Insurance. They couldn't believe that people would be paid that much money, enough to actually live fairly decently. They were shocked. And so this imposition of a blanket over the information, a silence between employees, is something that does need to be broken. I wish there were more substance to this bill, but this is a useful piece, and I think it needs to go forward.

Speaker, when you talk to stakeholders who have been working on this issue for a long time—and the Equal Pay Coalition has been working on this issue since 1976—they have a number of comments about this bill that I think need to be taken into account as we debate it.

1630

The reporting requirements fall short of other jurisdictions. Why on earth would that be the case? Why on earth would that be the case? Is it that there is a minority government situation where the government will fall if they bring forward stronger legislation, that they will be consigned to walking the streets asking for votes if they actually bring in something substantial? No. They're in full majority mode. If they wanted to bring in stronger legislation, they could do that. Still, with full power and authority as the government of Ontario, they fall short of other jurisdictions on reporting requirements.

They don't even match the legal obligations already imposed on Ontario employers. That's amazing to me. They don't even match the existing legal obligations. How does that happen in a majority government situation? Who is it within that government, or who is a friend outside that government, who is stopping them from actually covering everyone who's covered by existing legislation?

The Equal Pay Coalition also comments, "Pay transparency is tremendously important but if the government is going to do it, they have to do it right, to make sure it's effective." I'm not going to argue with that position. That makes a lot of sense to me. Do it right; don't mess around. It's not as if they don't have enough votes to deliver. They have all the votes they need to deliver what's required.

They note that this whole process will first be rolled out to the Ontario public service, and then, as I had said,

introduced to private sector employers at 500 employees and then 250 employees, and of course, with the appropriate consultation time. I guess I realize that a decade for consultation is probably the one they will settle on.

Note, Speaker, that small businesses represent 95% of all employers in Ontario and employ 28% of Ontario's workers, according to the Ministry of Labour. We're talking about a very big sector, and under current legislation they're supposed to have equal pay already. Why you wouldn't be rolling this out to everyone, every business that is covered by existing legislation, is beyond me.

As Fay Faraday of the Equal Pay Coalition had to say, "One hundred per cent of employers have an obligation to provide equal pay"—one hundred per cent. "The Human Rights Code doesn't carve out anybody. So there is no principle justification for restricting pay transparency." She's absolutely right; she's absolutely right. Women need to be treated fairly at every level of the economy. Whether it's an outfit with 10 or 11 employees, 500, 1,000 or 15,000, there is no reason here that all employers would not be covered. There is no reason that we don't address pay equity in every corner of this economy. It's a fundamental principle of fairness.

The Equal Pay Coalition goes on to note, "Civil service workers' pay structures are already transparent because they are unionized employees with publicly available collective agreements that lay out pay rates. Employees who make over \$100,000 a year "are also named on the sunshine list." What we have, Speaker, is a law that's going to be rolled out to a public sector where, one could argue, there's already a pretty high level of transparency. In effect, this law may have very little real impact in the public sector at the level of the Ontario public service, but it is going to be held back for an undetermined period for employers in the rest of the economy.

The Equal Pay Coalition notes that "pay transparency is about 'shifting the onus' of responsibility away from individual employees, who must currently file complaints about wage discrimination to get action, and onto employers to prove they're complying with the law." Well, yes, absolutely. Why is it that women who are unfairly underpaid have to go through a long process of fighting to get what is their right? If employers are paying people equally, are respecting the law, then there should be no difficulty in reporting that. In fact, if they have HR departments—and even small outfits have HR departments—they will know who their employees are. They will know what genders they are. They will know what they are getting paid. It isn't that complex.

What is being proposed doesn't actually address that fundamental issue of ensuring that all employers are covered. The gender pay gap in Ontario is 30%, according to the Equal Pay Coalition's calculations—30%. That's a gap that has narrowed by just 6% since the late 1980s, so let's say 30 years—a 2% correction per decade. At the current rate, it's going to take a long time before we have equal pay between men and women.

It makes no sense in this economy. It makes no sense morally or ethically. It makes no sense in terms of the ability of people, no matter what their gender is, to do the work that's required. It just doesn't make any sense, unless you want to ensure that some employer makes more money off a female employee than they make off a male employee, that their costs are lowered. That isn't a good basis for operating an economy. Male, female: It doesn't matter what you are or who you are. If you are doing equal work you should get equal pay, and if your work is devalued or downgraded because you're female, that needs to be corrected.

That gap sharpens considerably when you look at race and origin as well. The pay gap for indigenous women is 57%. That's shocking, completely shocking. For immigrant women it's 39%; for racialized women, 32%. You can't justify that, and you can't justify a bill that so weakly signals that this is something that needs to be corrected. It's hard to say that one would turn down a bill that even anemically moves things forward, but it is very easy to say that an anemic bill is totally inadequate to the purposes that need to be addressed.

Last year, the coalition drafted a model pay transparency law and urged the province to adopt it, so I will just point out to you, Speaker, that there are people who have done the groundwork. You don't have to do an awful lot of research to figure out what has to be put in place. It's already on the table.

Among other measures, it sets out employees' right to know their workplace's pay structure and requires all employers to file transparency reports to the Ministry of Labour and their shareholders every year. Why not? The Equal Pay Coalition calls for significant amendments to strengthen the act. They say that it should apply to all private and public sector employers with more than 10 employees, to match the Pay Equity Act. Well, that's just common sense. It should be consistent with the Pay Equity Act. There is no reason on earth that you would say you are moving forward transparency and you are not even going to meet the standard of already existing legislation. What's that all about? It should apply to all government procurement, so government contracts comply with equality rights. That's a very handy lever. Again, that's not something that's in this bill.

It should include mandatory timelines to file annual transparency reports with the Ministry of Labour. We do it with all kinds of other regulation. We set timelines. We set deadlines. We say you have to have it in at this point. That's something we need. And it says that employers should file this information to corporate shareholders. Well, Speaker, that makes a lot of sense to me, because there are shareholders that will care about their own reputation, some of whom are enlightened and want to see a workplace that is equal and fair. It would apply some pressure to management to actually figure out how they are going to do this.

Again, they note, clearly set out what information must be in the transparency report.

Speaker, I see that my time is running out. Again, even an anemic bill is one that I think I could vote for,

but I don't see why on earth a majority government can't actually deliver the goods.

1640

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Sam Oosterhoff): Questions and comments?

Hon. Harinder Malhi: I want to start by saying that no government has done as much as this government for women and girls in this province.

Pay transparency is very important to us, as is Then Now Next, our women's economic empowerment plan that we introduced two weeks ago. We have worked hard to ensure that women have equal opportunities in this province, and this is just another step in that direction. It's important for people to have those conversations and to have pay transparency so that they don't devalue themselves, so that they are able to ask for what they deserve.

We've made so many investments that I don't know where to begin at this point. We have invested in our gender-based violence plan up to \$242 million to support women and girls in our province. We want to ensure that our most vulnerable are taken care of, and as part of our women's economic empowerment plan, we also went to funding women's futures.

Pay transparency is part of a multi-pronged approach to ensuring that women have equal opportunity in our province. Pay transparency will allow women to be paid as they reach their full potential. We want to make sure that we are continuing to help women move forward in the corporate world.

Yes, we are starting. It's a start. We have been working towards this. We have built up to this. To date, our government has been working hard for all women in this province: for the last four years, for the last 15 years. Now that we're at a point where we can do this, we're ready to apply this pay transparency legislation. We have taken clear thought in making sure that this legislation is going to support everyone in the process of moving forward.

We're proud of the work that we have done. We're going to continue to work together to build on this work as we move forward with this and we move to smaller companies. We're going to continue the good work of our government when it comes to women and girls and ensuring that everyone feels empowered and safe in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Sam Oosterhoff): Questions and comments? I recognize the member for Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's so nice to see you in the chair today. It suits you.

I was listening to the member from Toronto-Danforth while he spoke on the government bill that we're speaking about today, pay transparency, specifically to address the fact that many in our society feel that women are not being paid fairly. I think we know that oftentimes that can be the case.

A few things have come forward this week; one is the sunshine list. For the top 10 names on the sunshine list—

I don't like to look at the bottom names, because it hasn't kept up with the cost of living and inflation. But of the top 10 names on our sunshine list, only one was a woman. I think we can look at the top names. Of the top 25 names, only four were women.

This government has had 15 years. They talk a lot about having a female Premier for the province, which we all know is exciting and wonderful. They talk a lot about all of the work that they are doing to promote women in their own cabinet and in other areas. But I think that just having a bill, which the member from Toronto-Danforth called an "anemic" bill because he felt it didn't have enough teeth—just saying you are going to have a bill, talking about a bill, promoting a bill at the end of almost 15 years in government is really too little, too late.

It's a little disappointing, I think, from this side of the House to see that the government is scrambling and, instead of addressing some of the really serious issues that we all face in our society, which is that people are paying more and feel like they're getting less—we need to focus on ensuring that everybody has a great job and not growing our bureaucracies, but focusing our bureaucracies on ensuring that everybody is feeling that they have good health care, good education, good prospects for everybody in our communities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Sam Oosterhoff): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would like to congratulate my colleague the member for Toronto-Danforth on his speech on the Pay Transparency Act. I think that he really effectively captured the reservations that my caucus has raised with regard to the effectiveness of this bill.

I think it's critical to keep in mind what pay transparency is about. This is an enforcement tool. It is an enforcement tool to ensure that companies and employers who are obligated by existing laws are actually fulfilling their legal obligations. Part of the reason that we have come to this point that we need pay transparency now—it is an important part of a legal framework—is because we have had three decades of very little movement on closing the gap. We have a gender pay gap in this province that has basically hardened at 30%. We have a Pay Equity Act that has been in place since the 1980s and has proven to be ineffective in closing the gap because the resources haven't been allocated to enforce the Pay Equity Act.

The Conservatives cut the funding to the Pay Equity Commission in half, from \$6 million to \$3 million, back in 1996. This Liberal government has done nothing to add the resources, to provide the resources that would be necessary for the Pay Equity Commission to enforce the act. As a result, we have far too many employers who are not fulfilling their obligations under the act. We need pay transparency in order to hold every employer in this province accountable—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Sam Oosterhoff): Thank you. I recognize the member for Beaches-East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted to have an opportunity to contribute to this debate and to respond to the member from Toronto–Danforth.

I find it quite incredible to hear the member from Thornhill and this great conspiracy of the right wing with the new centre-left wing. There seems to be so much they have in common. What I heard from the member from Toronto–Danforth's comments is how he would sabotage and not support a bill like this which has a chance to shine the light on some of the systemic barriers that women face in the workplace because it does not go far enough. That, for me, just speaks to an unwillingness to move this issue forward in a way that is extremely important.

When we brought the Pay Equity Act in, all employers had to go through a process to justify where their salaries were for work of equal value in the workplace. This has been done. It didn't go far enough, we all recognized. We have to get at the systemic barriers. So you start with the big employers, the prescribed employers, those doing public postings. This is the approach that has been taken in all other major jurisdictions: Australia, the United Kingdom and Germany, for example.

Now, understand: Ontario is the first jurisdiction in Canada to introduce a comprehensive package of measures to increase transparency around pay in the workplace. This is what we're seeing in Bill 203, the Pay Transparency Act. So I really would encourage the member from Thornhill, particularly, because I know that she is not getting more progressive, that she should be more clear about how it is she is supporting the NDP direction here to just say no to this bill because they don't think it goes far enough.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Sam Oosterhoff): I return to the member for Toronto–Danforth for final comments.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity.

First, I'll address the member from Beaches–East York. I strongly urge him to use these earpieces when he's listening to me speak, because I said I would vote for the bill even though I thought it was anaemic and far less than was needed to actually address the problem before us. I hope that he will in future use these earpieces and increase his understanding of what is said.

When it comes to the comments by the Minister of the Status of Women—"This is important to us. We want to look after the most vulnerable. Transparency is important to bring about equal pay"—we do want to look after the most vulnerable and we do want transparency. So why are you stopping at 250-employee firms? Why aren't you in compliance with the pay equity legislation that we have in place? Why are you bringing forward a bill that doesn't have any defined timelines for going beyond the Ontario public service into the private sector; that, in fact, ends at 250 employees? If you're actually concerned about this issue, why don't you bring in a bill with some teeth? If it's in place in other jurisdictions, then let's go forward and take the best of what they have and put it in place.

The member from Thornhill is right: Women are not paid fairly. She looked at the sunshine list. She noted one in 10 at the top was female; four in 25 at the top were female. Clearly this government has paid very little attention to making sure that women are able to advance in a way consistent with their talent and ability. That's just the way it is. That's just the way it is.

I'm happy to listen to those on the other side go on at length about this, because it is of no consequence. What I am unhappy about is a bill that doesn't do what needed to be done. That's what has to happen. That's what has to be moved forward.

1650

Speaker, I hope that when this bill goes to committee it actually gets strengthened so it does what it's supposed to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: Madam Speaker, I don't believe that we have a quorum.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise on this Thursday afternoon and to speak on the pay transparency government bill. The government is putting forward legislation to ensure that large businesses of 250 employees or more are paying their—I guess you could say they're paying their men as much as women; but I guess the focus here is to make sure that women are getting paid as much as men.

The member from Beaches–East York just called me right-wing, I believe. I can ask my colleagues from the third party if they were paying attention to what he said. He accused me of supporting the NDP, who he felt were not supporting this bill, when we just heard that they were supporting the bill. The member from Beaches–East York was calling me right-wing in a nasty tone, which suggested that he saw it as an insult. I wouldn't call that exactly parliamentary. I hope that maybe he's just in a bad mood today. I want him to know that I forgive him. I'm reminded of Lisa Raitt, the federal member for Milton. She was just called a Neanderthal, and I felt that same vibe of, somehow, contempt.

It reminds me of difficult times. I think I can speak for a lot of professional women—yes, we've had to ignore a lot. We've had to put up with a lot. It hasn't always been easy.

I started optometry school at the young age of 19, at the University of Waterloo, at a time when men were the majority of optometry students. Now it has completely reversed, where more than 75% of students in optometry school are women. That's not just at the University of Waterloo and in Canada; that's across North America and wherever optometry is a profession across the world.

When I started optometry, people asked me, “Why do you want to be an optometrist, out of all the professions or the jobs out there?” I came from a fairly progressive family, and my late father told me when I was quite young that he felt that it was more important for women to be educated in a profession because, “Men can go out and be construction workers and earn a good living. Women have to be able to stand on their own two feet. They can’t count on their future husband or other family members to support them.” He really encouraged his three daughters to have some kind of profession that they could practise and earn a decent living.

One of the reasons I went into optometry was that I realized at a fairly young age that, since optometry is paid through OHIP—back then, eye exams were covered for everyone of all ages. Unfortunately, it was the McGuinty Liberals who took away eye examination remuneration for 20- to 65-year-olds. When I graduated, everybody was covered to have their eyes examined at that time. I realized that, if OHIP is paying me—and medicare, when I practised in Quebec as well—when you’re getting paid by the government, you’re just a licence number. And when you are just a licence number, there is no male or female on that licence number; you are paid the same whether you are male or female. That was one of the things that attracted me to the profession that I practised for almost 30 years.

We’re talking today about pay transparency to ensure that companies are paying their workers fairly. It’s kind of like when we hear about what they used to term “the old boys’ club”: Men would offer jobs to their friends. That’s kind of the natural way of the world, that people do offer jobs sometimes to friends and relatives, but we have to ensure that people are being treated fairly and paid fairly.

I don’t know if it’s something that we can necessarily completely legislate, Madam Speaker. We have to work together as a society, I think, to make sure that women have the same opportunities as men, and to look at why sometimes women are not earning as much as men when they’re doing the exact same profession and the exact same job, because that’s what this is really about. Pay equity, in my opinion, is really about getting paid the same for the same job with the same training, the same education, the same qualifications, the same experience, the same history with the company—because you could be working for different companies; it’s not necessarily going to be the same—the same specialization, and the same workload.

It’s hard sometimes to sit and to judge, but we all, I think, firmly believe—all three parties, on both sides of the House—that everything being equal, an employee should be paid the same rate as anybody else in the company. And we’re not just talking about gender; we’re talking about whatever community they belong to, whatever religion, whatever culture, whatever their interests are.

I’m reminded of people who have told me that they felt that they advanced in their career because they

played golf, or they played baseball on the company team and they were one of the best baseball players and the company wanted to hold on to them. Maybe there are a lot of aspects sometimes to why people advance and why people are paid differently that we have to consider.

I think we all realize here that it’s a bit of a struggle, that women tend to be in certain female-dominated professions sometimes and men tend to be in other professions. I think that that is something, again, that we should be discussing and working towards. Is there more that we can do to encourage women? We see far more women engineers than we used to, but it’s still nowhere near on par with the number of males entering engineering.

We see women still overwhelmingly entering nursing and teaching and child care and just care in general. Are women going into those professions because they are feeling pressure to go into those professions? Is it a calling for them? I think that research has been done. I don’t know that it’s necessarily something that we can just decide one way or the other so easily, but I think that there are a lot of reasons why women find it easier to go into some of those professions than men.

I think maybe more can be done to encourage men to go into some of those professions. Maybe we’re focusing too much on the women and we’re not focusing enough on the men and encouraging men to go into some of the professions and balancing it out that way, as opposed to just focusing on the women.

We’ve heard a lot, Madam Speaker, and I know sometimes when we’re looking at you and we’re talking about your government, I know it’s hard for you not to internalize it and not to take it personally. As a woman to a woman—because it’s Madam Speaker in the Chair today; I’m always so happy to say that—you do understand when we say that your government has had 15 years to advance the status of women, advance the working conditions of women, advance the remuneration—the salaries—of women, and advance the supports for women. Because I think that too often women aren’t able to take a promotion or they aren’t able to transfer to another job easily because they are far more tied to their family life than maybe sometimes men are. And why is that, Madam Speaker? Why do the women feel responsible for what goes on in a home, more than so many men?

1700

I know just from my family that I was the one who got the forms and filled out the forms to register the kids for programs, often, or for summer camp. But I quickly learned when I got elected how much my husband absolutely enjoys being involved in family life, in taking care of things at our house. A lot of the things that I used to do he has now taken over. I kind of blame myself, maybe, for allowing myself to take over so many of those tasks.

I think that we’ve come a long way from when my father used to bathe us and it was a big secret. He wasn’t allowed to tell his friends or relatives, because it wasn’t something that men did, bathe the babies or get up at

night and feed the babies. But my mother was a chartered accountant. I've spoken about her, my late mother. She had four children, and we all figured out as soon as we were old enough to walk and talk that it was a real partnership. They really blurred the lines. They were way ahead of their time.

We have a government where, just last week, a minister called a medical professional standing behind him "eye candy," and another minister, on the same day, called my colleague the member for Nepean–Carleton "adorable." I mentioned previously that the federal MP for Milton, Lisa Raitt, was called a Neanderthal. I was, just minutes ago, called right-wing in a sort of angry voice by the member from Beaches—

Mr. Lorne Coe: Somewhere there.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Yes, somewhere out there. Beaches—I'm ready for a beach at the end of the day.

I mentioned in the questions and comments previously that of the top 10 names on the sunshine list this week, only one was a woman, and of the top 25 names, only four were women.

We have so many talented women that we meet. I think that sometimes people put on a brave face but they've been through a lot. We've all spoken to people in our communities who have had a difficult time finding employment, maintaining employment, or had problems with harassment and employment. I think that too often women don't feel empowered enough to speak up, and become victims because of that. So maybe we're not doing enough in our education system to empower women, to make girls, from a very young age, feel strong and feel able to advocate for themselves.

Just last week we had a really fantastic group of young women, medical school students, who are matching now for residency programs. They are seeing many in their classes—10% of the medical school students at U of T, just across the street from here, did not match this month for residency programs in the first round. Luckily, there is going to be a second round, but there is a lot of competition in the second round; international students enter.

I'm reminded that so many women in medical school end up in family medicine. When I ask them why, a lot of them say it's their first choice. That's their calling; they want to do family medicine. I wouldn't say, "Well, we need more women to go into surgery or other specialties," just so that we have that equality. Equality isn't always something that we want to strive for. We want people to have fulfillment and to fulfill their dreams.

But we're all left to sometimes wonder if women are choosing certain careers because they just feel that it's going to be too hard for them to have a family and enter a more demanding profession. It's not just about having supports if they want to have a child. You can certainly imagine in the surgical profession, where you're on call and you have to do so many extra years of difficult training, how difficult it is for women who are mothers with very young children.

We also have to recognize that maybe we have our female medical school students in school for too many years, if they have a biological clock which is a little more tricky than men's in order to be parents. We've all heard stories of men being on their second and third marriage and still managing to father children. It's not so easy for women, once they get into their late thirties, to conceive and to have a family. When we're having women tell us that it seems as though, every 10 years, there's another year to do before they can even enter medical school—plus the government has changed things over the years and added years to residency programs. It's very difficult sometimes to get positions if you don't have a fellowship, which is after a residency program. We're hearing of people now doing two fellowships, which means they have two specialties.

What are we doing, Madam Speaker, when some of the brightest young minds are in school until they're 35 years old and unable to feel completely fulfilled if they can't have a family?

Part of this bill is also about posting the transparency of salary rates in an effort to have more equity, and that companies would have to tell people what the salary range is when they're applying for a job. But more than that, it also protects people who want to tell a co-worker what they're earning. It would protect people from that, from having that discussion. I know we heard that companies aren't supposed to ask people what they were making at their previous job.

All of this sort of sounds a little draconian sometimes to discuss. I think it's something we do want to achieve—that people are being treated fairly and paid fairly—but I think that if we're going to have bureaucrats running around and visiting companies and interviewing people, it sounds like a very complicated process to me. I always prefer the carrot to the stick.

I'd like to see this bill go to committee. I'd like to hear what people have to say about it, but I would have liked to have seen a lot more things addressing the fact that we can do a lot more to encourage companies and to encourage women to advocate for themselves. Maybe we could have training sessions about women not being afraid to ask for raises, to push for raises.

I know John Tory, the mayor of Toronto, got in trouble just a year or two ago for saying that, when he was a CEO of a large corporation, he felt that women didn't push enough to get raises, while the men were very aggressive about it. Maybe it's considered not feminine to talk about money? I don't know, Madam Speaker. But I know in our field, in politics, that women tell me over and over that they find it far harder to raise money for their campaign than the men seem to find it. I think we have only ourselves to look at, to discuss, "Well, why is that so?" I am surprised when I hear that from female candidates or even from women who have already been elected. Why do they feel uncomfortable about saying things—the former MPP for Thornhill, my predecessor: I used to be amazed that he would call people, when he had to fundraise, and he used to say, "You don't like

getting these calls? Well, I don't like making these calls. So you better give enough that I won't be calling you again for a while"—you know, that kind of tough language. What would people think if a woman called them up and spoke to them like that?

Laughter.

Mrs. Gila Martow: The minister just laughed because he could see Peter speaking that way, in that sort of half-joking, half-serious deep voice, but it was effective. It was effective: "Give the maximum, and I won't be calling you for a year."

We can protect all we want, but at the end of the day there's just no limit. There's just no limit. We're far better off empowering people and educating people and creating the right business climate, where companies are desperate for employees and there's more than enough fulfilling jobs for everybody, so that we don't have so many people that we hear of now—and, too often, they're women—who are working two part-time jobs or three part-time jobs.

Companies are geared toward making a profit. Most companies that I know of are quite fair and quite nice, but when they're faced with hardships, they look for ways to get back to what they feel is the right profit margin for their company, where they want to be.

1710

They're certainly faced with a lot of challenges right now in Ontario. We've heard people talk about all the challenges for small businesses in terms of rising hydro rates. The minimum wage went up very quickly. I wasn't personally against seeing the minimum wage go up, but when a government is in power for 15 years and the minimum wage all of a sudden jumps up 30% just before an election, it's suspicious.

I think many of the small companies are reeling now from this new Liberal budget that says some of the small businesses are going to lose the exemption from paying the health premium tax—which is what we used to call it—that it's going to cost them, I believe, \$2,400 per employee in some of these small businesses. That's going to really be another kick in the head to some of our constituents who not only work but have to run these small businesses.

I'm really looking looking—

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: Speaker, a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: As much as I'm enjoying the comments from the member opposite, I would ask, Madam Speaker, that she stick to the purpose of our discussion today, which is about the gender pay gap, the gender wage gap and empowering women. I think she strayed a little bit from that, and I'd ask that she stay on the topic.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. I'll return to the member from Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I've been talking for almost 20 minutes, and I think I strayed for about 10 seconds. I

think I hit a nerve there, but that's not my problem. All I will say is that there is so much more that can be done.

I'll end with a note that the CEO for Hydro One got a \$1.7-million raise this year. How hurtful is that to any woman, man or child listening to us right now talking about the gender pay gap, that now his salary is at \$6.2 million for 2017?

I'll end on that note, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise to offer some thoughts on the comments from the member from Thornhill. I have to say that I was somewhat concerned with some of the comments she made around women maybe not going into lucrative careers or women not being forceful enough when they're trying to negotiate a pay increase. I'm very concerned about these kinds of comments because it really shifts the focus away from the systemic barriers, the systemic factors that contribute to a gender pay gap, and suggest that it's some kind of deficiency in women themselves: that they're not making wise career choices or they are not effective negotiators.

That is very problematic. I think what it reflects is the fact that the Conservative government perhaps doesn't believe that there is some kind of an obligation for the government to put in place a legal framework that would address the gender pay gap in an effective way.

When we think back to what happened in 1997, when the Conservatives cut the funding for the Pay Equity Commission in half, again we have to wonder whether maybe they just didn't think the Pay Equity Commission was that important, because after all, women should just negotiate harder in the workplace.

But then, of course, we look across the way and we see the Liberals, who have had 15 years to do something about the gender pay gap and have really been very, very ineffective. They did not restore the funding to the Pay Equity Commission that was needed so that that commission could do the work of enforcing the Pay Equity Act, and now, in the dying days of its mandate, they bring in this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: I'm always delighted to rise in the House on behalf of the good people of Burlington and join the conversation today and, in so doing, the MPP for Thornhill and the member for London West, with whom I served on the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment, by the way, and had the pleasure of doing so.

This is such an important topic. The gender wage gap is a pervasive and, as the member from London West referred to it, systemic issue that we need to address. I'm proud to sit on this side of the House and be part of a government that is supporting legislation that seeks to do that. We know that it unfairly disadvantages women from across Ontario and in every other jurisdiction we know.

This has been in the media quite a lot. I think of the BBC, for example, when there have been public conver-

sations. That's, in part, what we're seeking to do here. We're really trying to have a conversation in this province about what kind of society we want to be and have. In that context, we know Ontarians are supportive of the fact that currently there is a significant gender wage gap, which unfairly, again, disadvantages women across the province. It's time for a comprehensive plan that recognizes that economic empowerment isn't a quick fix and isn't a one-size-fits-all.

The member for Thornhill was talking about women's empowerment and supporting women. One thing that their side could do when it comes to the budget is support it, because we know that not having women in the workforce means that we're missing out on \$60 billion in economic activity. Having women fully engaged in the workforce—in fact, my colleague the Minister of Finance mentioned this yesterday in the budget speech: “Estimates show that women's full engagement in the economy could add approximately \$60 billion” to our gross domestic product. I'm happy to see the member opposite from Thornhill also mentioning that. We agree on that point.

I'm hoping that the party opposite is going to support this important legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: As always, it's an honour to rise and contribute to the debate this afternoon, and in this case also to be able to speak to the excellent speech and debate contribution that was brought forward by the member for Thornhill, my colleague and a strong female member of our team who has done a lot of work in her own right to empower women and help them to participate in the economy as well as to take up the opportunities that might come and push for more female empowerment, not only in politics but also in our broader economy.

I think we've heard a lot of good discussion today on this legislation. I look forward to hearing more contributions. There's something I want to touch on. Whether it comes to this issue or the issue of gender equality or whether it comes to some of these other issues the Liberal benchers like to talk about, it seems that they've really waited until the last second to talk about a lot of these things. It seems to be a bit of a political football almost.

If you look at the facts, it's clear that the budget for the Pay Equity Office is at the lowest it's been in its 30-year history. They currently have under \$3 million in their budget. With some vacancies not being filled, there are as few as 20 staff currently working in the office.

The reality is, we've seen that Premier Wynne waited over 26 months into her premiership before creating the Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee in the spring of 2015. If this truly was a priority, why is it being brought forward immediately before an election? Why is it that when our federal counterpart, such as the federal member for Milton, Lisa Raitt, questions the federal finance minister she's called a Neanderthal on these issues?

It seems to be almost disingenuous that the Liberals would bring it forward right before an election. Why are they waiting so long to get to the point?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It is always an honour to be able to stand in this House and speak on the issue that's being debated in the hour. Today it's the Pay Transparency Act.

I've listened to the member from Thornhill, but I would like to comment on the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook, who took the time to point out that the governing Liberals had not increased the money to the Pay Equity Commission or that the money was actually too short, too low. Perhaps he should have also pointed out that it was the Conservative government that halved it in 1997, cut it in half.

Earlier in the Legislature this afternoon, we had quite a fiery discussion about taxation and should our government or should it not freeze the right to tax. I think this is a good example. We can say that the Conservatives would like to say, and are going to likely say in the upcoming election campaign, that they should freeze taxes. This is the result.

The last time that they froze taxes, things happened like the Pay Equity Commission being cut in half, so the ability for people to go before that commission and have their case heard was also cut in half. That is the result of when you are blinded by the ideology that all taxation is bad and that the government can't do good work. Money has to be invested responsibly, but you have to realize what the public good is for, and that is a good example.

1720

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Thornhill to wrap up.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to thank the members from Timiskaming—Cochrane, from Niagara West—Glanbrook, from London West, and the President of the Treasury Board for their comments.

The member from London West seemed to have a problem that I was saying that I prefer the carrot-and-stick and I prefer encouraging. I mentioned Mayor John Tory and his comments and that they were met with a lot of negative reaction. I was just saying that that was his comment and that was his perception. I'm not saying that I support it or I don't support it; I'm just saying that we need to have that discussion about whether or not we need to empower women, we need to mentor women and we need to encourage women.

I was very lucky. I had a mother who was a chartered accountant at a time when almost all of my friends' mothers didn't work. How encouraging was that for me, Madam Speaker? I had a father who was very progressive and who thought women should go for higher education and have professions. My parents helped out with my education.

It wasn't so long ago—I know that it's hard for us to imagine—when people didn't see women as needing to be even educated, that boys went to school and girls stayed home and learned cooking and sewing.

We've come a long way—that's the expression—but we know that there's absolutely more to be done. The question is, what can we do to encourage women, to help women, to support women—and we have to realize that it's not just about men and women. There are differences in their biological clocks. There are differences in the family structures in some communities, the expectations. There are cultural pressures. We have to help the women to understand that this is Canada—it's a very progressive society—and that we want them to fulfill their dreams and that we want to help them fulfill their dreams.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? I recognize the member from Whitby—Oshawa.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker, and good afternoon. It's always wonderful to see you in the chair. Happy Easter.

It's a privilege to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 3, the Pay Transparency Act, 2018. What's clear in the discussion of that legislation is that pay equity is an issue that the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party has long advocated for. In fact, going all the way back to June 15, 1987, the Pay Equity Act was unanimously approved in the Legislature. On that day, the former Premier of Ontario, Mike Harris, was the spokesperson for the Pay Equity Act debate during third reading of that legislation.

For reference, the Pay Equity Act addresses systemic issues with lower pay for women in female-dominated industry and attempts to ensure women receive equitable pay to men for performing different jobs of equal value.

It's notable that, more recently, the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus suggested that the Liberal government work with the official opposition and the third party to create a special legislative committee of the Legislature to sit over the spring and summer of 2017, with the objective of reporting back to the Legislature with suggested amendments to strengthen the Pay Equity Act. But rather than work collaboratively to address pressing concerns within the Pay Equity Act, the government dragged its heels and has suddenly proposed pay transparency legislation less than two months prior to the provincial election.

What I'd like to turn to next is what transpired over the last three years. Chronology is important here as we discuss this important piece of legislation. In the spring of 2015, the government created an expert panel to study how to close the gender wage gap. In the spring of 2016, they received the final report of the Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee. In the fall of 2016, roughly six months after receiving the committee's final report, the government held a press conference and stated that they would bring together more experts to create definitive plans.

The second committee met over the course of five days, their last meeting being over six months ago, in September 2017. Finally, last week the government suddenly announced that they would strengthen the Pay Equity Office and proposed a new bill regarding pay transparency.

The bottom line, Speaker, is that for two years the Liberal government sat on its hands after receiving the

final report from the four-person expert panel. In fact, on the Pay Equity Commission's website, the timeline of inaction goes back even further. The website says this: "There have been no amendments since 1993 to accommodate the changes to jobs and employment structures, making maintenance in both the private and public sectors challenging. The act does not set out reporting requirements as in Quebec, nor time limits for initiating complaints, nor any cap on retroactivity of adjustments when employers have not met the act's requirements. These issues present significant and ongoing barriers to enforcement and result in" Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal "litigation."

The government has had ample notice, as I just demonstrated going through the chronology and reading for the benefit of the Speaker as well as the other members in the Legislature. They've had ample notice of the challenges in the existing legislation. But in the meantime, the operating budget for the Pay Equity Office is the lowest it's been over the institution's 30-year history. That's 30 years, Speaker. Yet, suddenly and coincidental with the provincial election, the government decided to table legislation at the eleventh hour in an effort to persuade Ontarians that they care about the issue of pay equity. But make no mistake: The proposed measures in Bill 3 are not about pay equity. Rather, this is a political ploy to save a tired government and a Premier who will say, do and promise anything to cling to power.

On average, women in Ontario are paid 30% less for doing the same work as men, a gap that is only 6% smaller than it was at the time of the Pay Equity Act's passage in the Legislature over 30 years ago. Over the course of the Liberal government's 15 years in power, there has been a lack of real progress, as I demonstrated earlier in my remarks. The women of this province deserve equal pay for work of equal value, and it's concerning that the government only brings this issue forward close to an election.

It's instructive, as part of this discussion of the proposed legislation, to look at some of the practices in other jurisdictions. As an example, Quebec has had online public reports on pay equity compliance since 2011. It has been in place since 2011. It applies to all businesses with an average of 10 employees or more. It's instructive to see some of the practices in Europe. For example, in Belgium, in 2012, a law was adopted to reduce the gender wage gap. It applied to firms with 50 employees or more. Finally, in Denmark, there is now pay transparency legislation in place since 2014, and it applies to companies with 35 employees or more.

Speaker, I'd like to turn to February 14, 2018. The Financial Accountability Office offered a commentary on 2017's labour market performance and highlighted the impact of the government's inaction in addressing pay equity. The Financial Accountability Office had this to say: "Wages grew very slowly in 2017, continuing the trend of weak wage growth since the 2008-2009 recession...."

"On average, women earned 87 cents for every dollar earned by men in 2017. The gender pay gap ... has not

improved since 2011, and is present across all industries and the vast majority of occupational classifications.”

1730

I would note that the government had years to address Ontario's stagnated wages and chose not to do anything until an election year.

The proposed bill before the Legislature this afternoon is also an effort to undo some of the damage the government has done to the business community in the wake of the rushed approach with Bill 148, which received royal assent on November 27, 2017. We're seeing the fallout of Bill 148 in businesses across Ontario. Many of the business operators and owners in Whitby–Oshawa are struggling to remain open as a result of the measures included in Bill 148, some of which took effect on January 1, 2018, with others taking effect as of January 1, 2019.

One such business owner is Mark Wafer. He owns Megleen Treadstone and operates several small businesses in the region of Durham and other parts of the province. At the July 21, 2017, Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, Mr. Wafer had the opportunity to present his perspectives on the negative impacts of Bill 148 on his workers and businesses to the committee members. In highlighting those impacts, Mr. Wafer's testimony focused on the lives and livelihoods of some of Ontario's most vulnerable workers, whom he regularly employs: those with disabilities. In fact, according to his testimony, Mr. Wafer has employed over 160 workers with disabilities over the past 25 years, and today, 46 of his current employees have a disability.

Coming back to his testimony at the standing committee, Mr. Wafer commented on the unemployment rate for Ontarians with disabilities. He had this to say—

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Point of order, Madam Speaker: I've been listening to the member opposite's debate and I really think he should bring his debate back to the bill that's on the table, being debated. He's referring to Bill 148, which is not part of the bill that we're debating here today.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. I just want to remind the member from Whitby–Oshawa to stay on the current bill before the House.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. I look forward to continuing. What I was describing, with your indulgence, were the unintended consequences of Bill 148, and I was directly quoting the testimony of one of the leading advocates for those with challenges and disabilities in the province of Ontario.

The Pay Transparency Act, as proposed, and in particular—excuse me; I'll just take some water for a moment. The new pay transparency measures would dovetail with the “equal pay for equal work” requirement in the Employment Standards Act. As written, the requirements in this bill dictate that employees performing substantially the same kind of work in the same establishment, requiring the same skill, effort and responsibility, and working under similar conditions, cannot be paid differently based on their sex.

In a March 6, 2018, Toronto Star piece, a Ministry of Labour spokesperson provided some detail on the purpose of this legislation from the government's perspective: “The intent of the new legislation is to increase disclosure in hiring processes, around workforce composition and aggregate pay gaps by gender and other diversity characteristics.” This spokesperson added, Speaker, that the ministry would be encouraging smaller employers to release the same data.

However, I would note that the proposed provisions in Bill 3 entail a delayed rollout of the requirements of the bill for the public service, and large and medium-sized businesses. First, the requirements would be enacted on the Ontario public service workplaces. They would subsequently be introduced for private sector workplaces with more than 500 employees, and then those with more than 250 employees. But civil service workers' pay structures are already transparent as they are unionized employees with publicly available collective agreements that lay out the pay rates for the varying employee group classifications. Additionally, civil service employees who are paid a salary in excess of \$100,000 are also named on the sunshine list.

In looking at the impacts of Bill 3's proposed measures on the private sector, I'd like to highlight for you some of the comments made by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. While the vast majority of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business members are generally smaller employers, below Bill 3's proposed worker threshold of 250 employees, the members are worried, and rightly so, that the proposed legislation's requirements would bleed into smaller businesses via expectation, if not through regulation. This could make operations difficult for smaller employers, especially for those outside of the larger urban centres, many of whom are struggling to find qualified workers. In fact, Speaker, the shortage of skilled labour is often the top limitation on sales or production growth for the Ontario-based membership of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

I would also note, as part of this discussion of the legislation, comments from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce's Ontario Economic Report released on February 7, 2018. The chamber's original economic research echoed the sentiment that I just expressed, revealing that 77% of Ontario businesses say that access to talent remains the largest impact on their competitiveness. In conjunction, smaller businesses do not have the same resources as their larger counterparts when it comes to offering larger compensation packages. The proposed requirement in Bill 3 related to advertising salary ranges on publicly posted job descriptions could make it potentially more difficult for small businesses to find and hire qualified individuals.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business is not alone in providing some criticism of Bill 3. For example, the Equal Pay Coalition also has some concerns on the proposed provisions in Bill 3. In a March 6, 2018, Toronto Star piece, Fay Faraday, the co-chair of the

Equal Pay Coalition, welcomed the first three proposed measures in Bill 3, but added that the reporting requirements fall short of other jurisdictions, some of which I cited earlier in my narrative, and don't even match legal obligations already imposed on Ontario employers.

In that same piece, Ms. Faraday also said, "Pay transparency is tremendously important but if the government is going to do it, they have to do it right to make sure its effective." She went on further to speak about the proposed provisions in Bill 3, saying, "Every single employer should have this information at their fingertips. What they're proposing has some good elements but it doesn't actually address that fundamental issue."

Speaker, while I can appreciate the intent of Bill 3's proposed measures, it's clear that the government needs to improve this legislation at second reading and at the committee level. I would add that there are additional concerns with Bill 3 as proposed that my colleagues and I in the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus share.

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First, the provisions related to allowing compliance officers to enter businesses without a warrant to conduct workplace audits do not include any indication of how many compliance officers will be required to effectively enforce the act, bringing unknown additional costs, potentially, to the ministry and the taxpayer.

Second, a significant portion of Bill 3 is left to be determined by regulation. While, as currently proposed, Bill 3's provisions would only apply to the civil service and medium and large businesses, I would again echo the concern of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business that the minister may decide at a later date to extend the requirements to every business in Ontario, regardless of size.

The ability to determine law through regulations—and I've spoken about this previously on other pieces of legislation—provides enormous power to the minister to enact the specific measures of Bill 3 when and how the government wishes. Ultimately, ministers of the crown should be tabling complete bills in the Legislature to give all members of the Legislature an opportunity to participate in robust debate regarding the impact of the proposed new measures and amendments to existing legislation. That is already underpinning part of our discussion today, and I highlighted that earlier.

At the end of the day, this is about the fact that there have been no amendments to the Pay Equity Act since 1993. More recently, the government only decided to strike an expert panel in 2015, dragging their heels for years before tabling today's proposed legislation.

I look forward, as I indicated in my comments, to this legislation coming forward to a standing committee. There are aspects of this bill that, as I again stated earlier in my narrative, I support, but there are clearly some challenges in the legislation that warrant additional discussion in committee stage. And bring it back to the Legislature so we can discuss the relative merits of the legislation again.

I thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to debate Bill 3 today. I wish you and my colleagues in the Legislature this afternoon a happy Easter.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I want to thank the member for Whitby–Oshawa for his well-thought, well-presented response to the bill. Happily, it was quite coincident with the points that I was setting out earlier, that what we have is a bill that falls far short of any kind of bill that's going to be effective with regard to the pay equity issue, one that doesn't even touch on all those employers that are covered by current pay equity legislation. He addressed that and addressed the fact that the Equal Pay Coalition has substantial criticisms very much in line with what we have made and what the member has made.

I go back to the government on this. They have a majority. They could put forward legislation with pay transparency that would enforce pay equity, which is what this is all about. This is not something exotic. If we want to have pay equity, what are the different avenues that we have to go along in order to reach that goal?

This pay transparency would be a helpful tool, but to shortchange women in this province because—I don't know why. I have no understanding for a moment, Speaker, as to why they wouldn't use their majority to bring forward legislation that actually delivered what had to be delivered. They have the power; they have the responsibility to do this. They have said for years that they have the interest in doing this.

Well, 15 years have passed. We're a few months before an election that may well turf them out, and now they're saying, "We're going to do something more about pay equity," but they bring in a very pale shadow of what's actually required.

The member for Whitby–Oshawa was very clear in his remarks that this is not what women in this province deserve. This is not what the people of this province deserve. We need a far more effective act. My hope, and I'm sure it's his as well, is that when this goes to committee, it gets the amendments that are required.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Hon. Peter Z. Milczyn: It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon in the House and speak to this issue, to Bill 3, the Pay Transparency Act. I want to thank the member from Whitby–Oshawa for his comments.

This proposed bill, as has been discussed, is about publicly posting what the salaries for different positions are and to prevent employers from inquiring about the current or previous salaries of an employee, all with an eye to ensuring that when somebody gets hired, they get paid what they should be paid for that position in that place of employment and are treated as equally and fairly as other employees in that position.

I listened very carefully to the member from Whitby–Oshawa, and he seemed to be saying two different things at the same time. The one point, that this is too much—too much red tape, too much bureaucracy, another burden

being imposed on small business—and yet it doesn't go far enough.

I heard some of the comments regarding the Equal Pay Coalition and their concerns about the bill. I think those are legitimate concerns. I'm sure that through the process, they will be listened to and addressed. But fundamentally, what's important is not just words but deeds. Increasing the minimum wage—we know women disproportionately work at the minimum wage; increasing that helps women. Providing free child care helps women and families. All of the things that we have been doing for a number of years as a government and in our latest budget are all designed to help women and families and all Ontarians, yet the Conservatives vote against them. So who is helping women, Madam Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the speech from the member from Whitby—Oshawa on Bill 3, An Act respecting transparency of pay in employment. I thought he did an excellent job talking a bit about the history of the Pay Equity Act that was put in place in 1987 and the panel that was set up in 2015 and that did its report in 2016. But it does seem to me that this is a weak effort to actually make changes.

I think back to—it has to be at least 10 years ago when visiting the Huntsville Community Living office. I remember that they were talking a lot about their finances and how, at that time, they were struggling to be able to offer competitive wages. I also recall that they had something like a 40-year timeline to be able to actually fulfill their obligations to do with pay equity. I'm sure, if I checked back, it wouldn't be any better now. In fact, in the last eight years, I think their funding has pretty much been frozen, so I'm sure they wouldn't have been able to address their pay equity responsibilities that are very clearly stated.

I just wonder how much this bill is really going to do. The member talked about unintended consequences. Well, I certainly hope that this bill will go to committee and we'll hear from small businesses, from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and from the chambers of commerce on the bill, because I think it is important to know what the real effects will be on the ground and whether it's going to make any real and meaningful difference.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise to respond to the comments from the member from Whitby—Oshawa. I suspect that there were more than a few eyebrows raised when we listened to the member talk about the fact that this legislation does not go far enough. He talked about other jurisdictions that have introduced pay transparency legislation. In those jurisdictions, those legislative initiatives apply to firms with far fewer than the 500 employees—or eventually the 250 employees—that are contemplated in this bill.

I think that we have to take this with a bit of a grain of salt, because we have to look at the record of the Conservatives to understand their commitment to addressing the gender wage gap. We know that in 1997, the former Conservative government cut in half the budget for the Pay Equity Commission. That was the body that was responsible for enforcing the Pay Equity Act.

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We also know that under this Liberal government the budget for the Pay Equity Commission has never been restored. The member from Parry Sound—Muskoka made the very accurate observation that many of the government-funded, publicly funded organizations are not able to meet their pay equity obligations under the Pay Equity Act because successive governments have not funded them to do so. So not only is the Pay Equity Commission not funded to do its enforcement, the organizations that rely on public funding do not get the resources that they need either in order to fulfill their obligations under the act.

Government underfunding under both the Conservatives and—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. I return to the member for Whitby—Oshawa to wrap up.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I would like to thank the members from Toronto—Danforth, Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Parry Sound—Muskoka and London West. Each spoke with eloquence and passion on Bill 3.

But there are some facts that bear repeating here tonight. The gender pay gap in Ontario is 30%, a gap that has narrowed by just 6% since the late 1980s. To put that figure in perspective—because this is an important distinction—if a man were to retire today at age 65, a woman would have to keep working until she was 79 to quit with the same earnings—to quit with the same earnings. The wage gap has not decreased in the last decade. Facts matter.

Meanwhile, let's turn to the budget for the Pay Equity Office. I know this is a bit repetitive because I referenced it in my earlier 20-minute remarks, but I want to leave this with you: The budget for the Pay Equity Office is the lowest it has been in its 30-year history. They currently, as I stand in my spot tonight, have a \$2.999-million budget. They have vacancies to be filled. There are as few as 20 staff currently working in the office.

I'll end with this: For three-fifths of the Liberal government's mandate, the gender pay gap has remained unchanged, and now, on the heels of an election 70 days away, we have legislation being introduced.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour for me to add some comments on Bill 3, Pay Transparency Act, regarding pay equity. We are in favour of this legislation. We think it could go farther.

But I would just like to—pay transparency is just one issue in our society that's systemic. There are systemic problems to allowing women to succeed.

I will give you an example that has nothing to do with pay transparency. We had a dairy farm. When we decided to sell the dairy farm, I can't tell you how many people said, "But didn't your son want to take it over?" We have one son and three daughters. They are every bit as capable of running a business as our son. Our son is capable; our daughters equally so.

I don't often brag about my kids, but I'm going to brag about my kids today. One daughter is an administrator of a multi-million-dollar non-profit. My second daughter just wrote her bar exam yesterday. My third daughter is going to do her PhD at the University of Waterloo in remote sensing.

Applause.

Mr. John Vanthof: They are, and yet I have people wondering if my daughters could run a farm.

Mr. Norm Miller: Where did the brains in the family come from?

Mr. John Vanthof: I have one other very successful, independent woman in my life, and that's my partner. That's where a lot of the intelligence comes from. It's certainly where the drive comes from.

That's something that's systemic in our society, and that's something that we all have to fight every day. Pay transparency is one part of it.

We are in a political institution here, so I'm going to continue on a few political points.

To the last speaker: To talk about the Liberals—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, thank you, Minister. I'm known for having bad tie etiquette.

Hon. David Zimmer: Aw, Michael. It's not bad. It's not bad at all. Cut the guy some slack.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I tried to do it discreetly.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm not a discreet guy.

For the Conservatives to say that the Pay Equity Commission is underfunded—they cut it by half.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, you did. That's not an excuse for having it underfunded, but it's a case of the pot calling the kettle black.

The Liberals had 15 years to fully fund it. To say, "Well, it didn't need to be fully funded"—in some cases, when someone goes before this commission for a case to be heard, sometimes it takes three years. Obviously, it is in need of more funding. This government has been in power for 15 years and has declined to do so.

We need to take this issue seriously on behalf of my daughters and their generation, and on behalf of the generation of pages who are sitting on the dais. We need to take this issue seriously, because it's us who have the power to make this happen.

This legislation is a small step. There's other legislation that actually is stronger than this. For the government to put forward legislation like this and in public organizations not provide the funding so that they cannot just comply with the legislation, but actually have pay equity—that would be the proof of their actual commitment to this issue. This is one of the most important issues that we deal with here.

The member who brought up—a man can retire at 65 and a woman at—

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Seventy-nine.

Mr. John Vanthof: Seventy-nine. That should never happen. We need to be able to rectify that, because there is no difference in the skill set; there is no difference in the ability. The difference is in the systemic problems we have in our society that hurt women across this province.

I'm hoping that you're going to call 6 o'clock, Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Seeing that it's almost 6 o'clock, I will be adjourning the House until Monday, April 9, 2018, at 10:30 a.m. Have a great Easter.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Ted McMeekin
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lou Rinaldi
Granville Anderson, James J. Bradley
Grant Crack, Joe Dickson
Jennifer K. French, Jack MacLaren
Deborah Matthews, Ted McMeekin
Lou Rinaldi, Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Monique Taylor
Lorne Coe, Mike Colle
Vic Dhillon, John Fraser
Ann Hoggarth, Gila Martow
Ted McMeekin, Peter Tabuns
Monique Taylor
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Jocelyn McCauley